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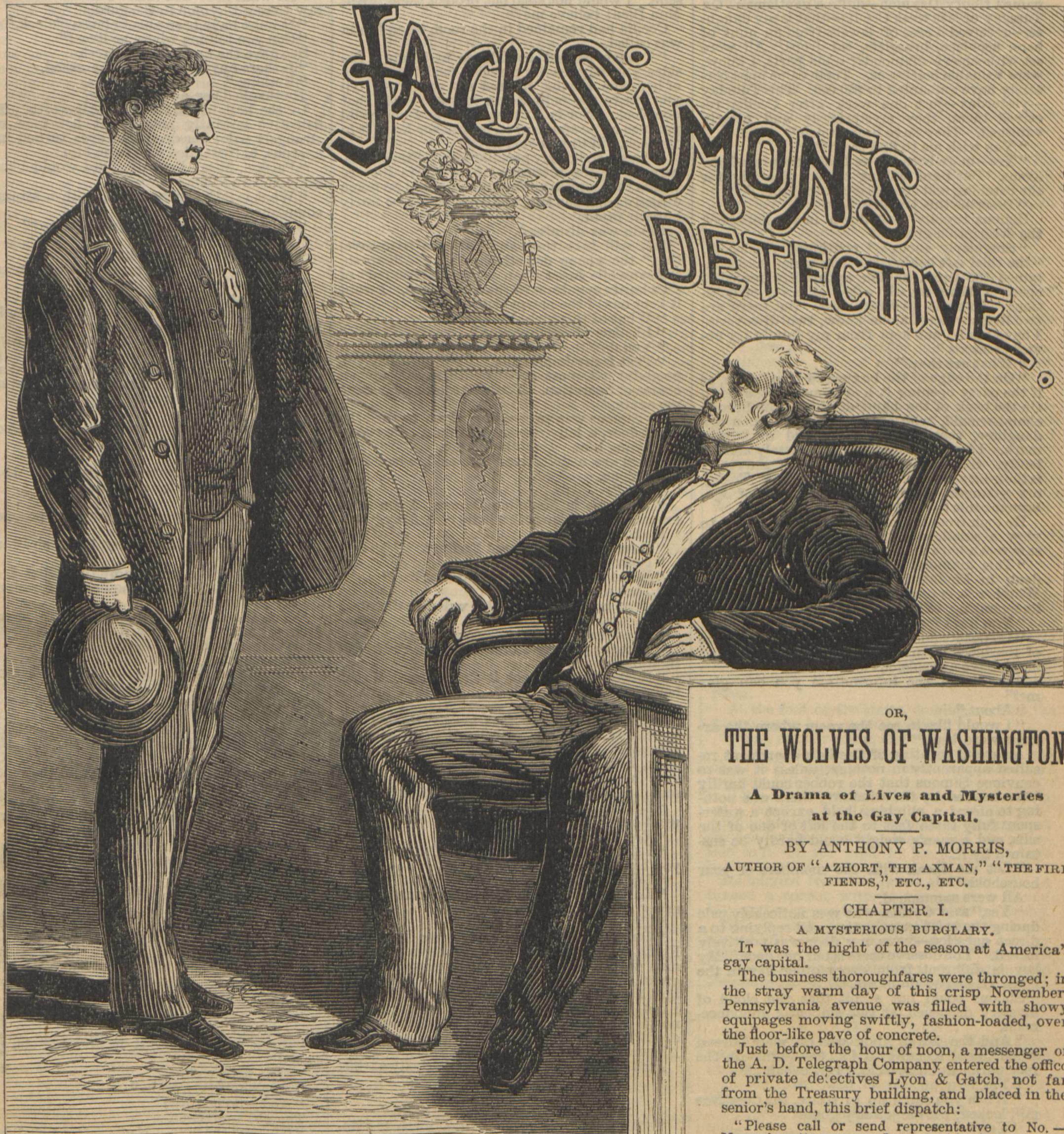
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OR,
THE WOLVES OF WASHINGTON.

A Drama of Lives and Mysteries
at the Gay Capital.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "AZHORT, THE AXMAN," "THE FIRE
FIENDS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS BURGLARY.

It was the hight of the season at America's
gay capital.

The business thoroughfares were thronged; in
the stray warm day of this crisp November,
Pennsylvania avenue was filled with showy
equipages moving swiftly, fashion-loaded, over
the floor-like pave of concrete.

Just before the hour of noon, a messenger of
the A. D. Telegraph Company entered the office
of private detectives Lyon & Gatch, not far
from the Treasury building, and placed in the
senior's hand, this brief dispatch:

"Please call or send representative to No. —
Massachusetts avenue. Important business.

"JOHN ALLSWORTH."

"Return to Mr. Allsworth and say that it

"MY NAME IS SIMONS," EXHIBITING HIS BADGE. "MR. SIMONS, I HAVE A
MYSTERIOUS CASE FOR YOU."

will be attended to immediately. No other answer."

"All right, sir."

When the boy had departed, Lyon accosted his clerk.

"Where's Jack Simons?"

"Gone to dinner."

"Hunt him up and tell him I want him."

Within twenty minutes Simons reported. A fine looking young fellow with bold black eyes, a slight mustache, of muscular build and a demeanor of easy confidence.

"Take this and see what it means," said Lyon, handing over the message.

In due time Simons was at the mansion No.—Massachusetts avenue. A large, handsome structure—a corner lot—having an extensive garden with a fountain and rose-vine grown arbors, which, in summer-time, further beautified the place. The rear wall of the garden sided on a narrow court built in a block of humble two-story houses.

Simons was ushered into a cosey little reception room, already aware, by the indications of his surrounding, that John Allsworth must be a very wealthy man.

A gray-haired gentleman of commanding mien and smoothly shaved face, was seated at a table as if awaiting his coming.

"You are from Messrs. Lyon and Gatch?"

"Yes. My name is Simons," exhibiting his badge.

"Mr. Simons, I have a mysterious case for you."

"My daughter is soon to be married to a man named Henry Daymon—quite a gentleman. On Tuesday of last week Cecilia—that is my daughter—received a case of jewels from an aunt of hers: necklace, bracelets, ear-drops. All were set with superb diamonds; some parts, I know, were valuable heirlooms. Their value must certainly have amounted to \$50,000. This Tuesday—yesterday—just one week after Cecilia received them, they mysteriously and utterly vanished. They have been stolen."

"You wish me to find them?"

"Yes—more because, as I said, there are heirlooms. But I am willing to pay liberally for the catching and conviction of the thief."

"Describe this jewelry, please."

Simons rapidly took down in his note-book the description given.

"Singularly enough," continued Allsworth, "the thief left behind the box which had contained the gems, having apparently forced it open. I have myself asked all sorts of questions. There is no direct clew. But there are two items which I alone know, two discoveries I have made, but kept from my family for obvious reasons."

"What are they?"

"On the edge of the box was a blood-stain, as if the party opening it had wounded the flesh. On the back of the hand of Finfin, the French chambermaid, who especially waits upon my daughter, there was a slight red or bloody mark. I have watched the girl closely and silently. She baffles my perception if she really is the guilty party. But the other item. To-day my youngest child, Amy, ten years of age, brought this to me."

He took from his vest pocket and held up to view a small, sparkling object which Simons saw was a bare diamond.

"This diamond Amy found, quite by accident, in Finfin's bedroom, under the bureau. Whether it is one of the lost gems, torn from its mounting, of course I am unable to say."

"You have formed a theory, perhaps."

"Do not its finding there, and the coincidence of the blood-stain on the box and on Finfin's hand, have a suspicious look?"

"Is this all the information you can give me?"

"About."

"I would like to see the room where the articles were kept."

A careful scrutiny of Cecilia's apartment resulted apparently in nothing, unless it was to convince Simons that the robber could hardly have entered by the windows; there was nothing to afford a climbing hold except a water-spout fully three feet to the left of one of the sills, and a man's weight could hardly be sustained by it.

"Let me speak with the members of your household."

All were summoned.

"Yes," said Cecilia, who was noticeably pale during the brief examination, and replying to a direct question—"yes, my door was positively locked. You observe there is but one door. My key is different from every other key in the house; it has no duplicate."

Simons could but admit that the cloud of mystery deepened at this emphatic announcement.

"And the jewelry box was on your bureau when you descended to join the family in the rear parlor at eight o'clock last evening?"

"Yes."

"When you came up to retire, the door was still locked, but the jewelry gone?"

"Yes."

His eyes searched around vainly, as if for a trap-door, a secret panel, a hole in the ceiling.

an entrance by the chimney. The room was heated by a register.

The last to be examined was Finfin, the French maid.

"My girl," looking her sharply in the face, "last night, when the jewels were stolen, you had on the back of your hand a blood-mark."

She turned a trifle white and stared at him.

"Do you remember it?"

"Yes, monsieur," was the unsteady reply.

"Ah! And on the jewelry box, too, there was a blood-mark. Now you will tell us how the stain came to be on the back of your hand."

"A pin scratch, that's all. If monsieur will look he can see at once—"

"Pah!" broke from John Allsworth.

Simons motioned him to be silent. He examined the back of the maid's hand. True, there was a wound there very much like such a scratch as a pin would make.

"How came this to be in your bedroom, under your bureau?" he interrogated, further, and showing the diamond.

She gazed at the brilliant stone in amazement undoubtedly genuine. Then a new and startled look settled in her dusky face.

"My room!—you found it there?"

"Yes."

"Oh, monsieur!" throwing herself on her knees with clasped hands. "I see how it is. You think I am the thief!"

"I have not said so."

"But you think it of me. I am innocent, Monsieur Simons. I swear to you I am no thief. I know not where are the jewels of mademoiselle. I would not steal but protect them. Ah, Mon Dieu! believe me!"

Cecilia had remained in the room when Finfin was called.

"I have perfect confidence in Finfin. Besides, you may readily perceive the impossibility of her even having entered my room, as I tell you I have the only key in existence to fit that door-lock. Nor is it likely that any one could produce a *fac-simile* of it, as I never leave it in the lock. Will you look at it?"

It was a strikingly peculiar key. Simons discerned, by the intricacy of its levers for the wards that, unless an impression could be taken directly from the key, the lock would be fairly burglar proof.

Finfin was dismissed.

"It will take time and patience to unravel this," the young detective said, to Allsworth. "Meanwhile insist upon secrecy on the part of all who are cognizant of the occurrence. I want it kept out of the newspapers."

"What of this girl—Finfin?"

"I believe she is innocent."

"You do?"

"That is my impression. I will now bid you good-day. I must debate with myself upon a course of operation. You will see or hear from me again."

As Simons was proceeding alone toward the front door, a lady appeared from a side room, beckoning him. He followed her.

"You are a detective?" she said, when they were alone.

"Yes."

"My name is Madeline Damer. I am governess to Mr. Allsworth's little girl, Amy."

He bowed.

"Have you interrogated Finfin?"

"I have."

"What is your opinion regarding her?"

"That she is innocent."

"Then how happened the valuable diamond to be found in her room?"

He answered by a counter question:

"Perhaps you knew of that before the investigation up-stairs?"

"Little Amy brought it first to me. I sent her with it to her father."

"Oh, is that it?"

Simons studied her face keenly though not impolitely. She was rather tall, of comely appearance, self-possessed; her complexion was dark, hair black, the expression of her hazel eyes having an engaging candor and at the same time betraying great penetration.

"I have something to tell you," Madeline went on.

"Well?"

"I think I can give you more of a clew than you have yet gathered."

"I shall be glad to hear it."

"Last Tuesday, you remember, was a dark, rainy night?"

"True."

"On that night, at an early hour, I observed Finfin at the side entrance conversing with a man who was wrapped unrecognizably in a great cloak. Their voices were toned so low that I could not catch their sentences. But this I did hear him say to Finfin: 'No mistake, now! You are sure you have described to me exactly which window it is that open from Miss Allsworth's room on the garden side?'"

Jack Simons's ears pricked interestedly at this.

CHAPTER II.

JACK SIMONS TAKES THE "CASE."

THERE was a moment's pause, when the detective urged her to proceed.

"I could distinguish nothing further than this

between them. But there is something else which may strike you as having a bearing upon this meeting. Last night, the night of the robbery, it being very beautiful with moonlight, I entered the garden for a few breaths of fresh air before retiring. Almost involuntarily I sought a seat in one of the arbors, fascinated by the radiance around me. Though bright outside, my position was wholly concealed by the shadow inside. I heard a sudden sound near the arbor, like running feet, and presently a scuffle. Then a voice cried, in an undertone: 'Ah! I have you at last!' The next minute some one stepped fully before my view in the moonlight, close to the arbor entrance. It was a man. In his hand he held something that sparkled and flashed, and, pausing there in the act of inspecting it, he murmured: 'How very, very beautiful this is; and of great value, too. Quite a haul!' Then he disappeared."

"Of course this man was a stranger to you?"

"By no means."

"No!" in surprise.

"It was Henry Daymon."

"The affianced of Cecilia Allsworth?"

"It was he."

"And what was it he held in his hand, and you saw, in the moonlight?"

"It was, without any mistake, one of the diamond-studded bracelets Cecilia Allsworth had shown me as a present from her aunt."

"Then you think—"

"I think nothing," interrupted Madeline Damer, quietly. "I merely acquainted you with facts I have witnessed."

"At what hour was this? I mean when you saw Henry Daymon in the garden."

"It must have been about eleven o'clock."

"Can you tell me where he lives?"

She gave the number and street.

"Is there anything more?" he asked.

"Nothing."

He thanked her and withdrew.

In the hall he met Cecilia Allsworth. The detective instantly noted that her face was strangely pale; her deep blue eyes turned in a nervous, half-startled way upon him.

"Pardon, Miss Allsworth, but I would like to ask you a question or two."

"What is it?" she returned, with a strained composure.

"When did you last see Mr. Daymon?"

"Last evening."

"Here, in your father's house?"

"Certainly, sir," with an accent of hauteur.

"At what hour did he leave?"

She hesitated before answering.

"It was precisely half-past ten. I remember looking at my watch as he departed."

"Did you go straight to your room afterward?"

"No. When I retired I again consulted my watch. It was then a few minutes after eleven."

"The jewels were gone?"

"Yes."

"They were surely there when you left your room earlier in the evening?"

"Positively."

"Did you look from your window? If so, did you see any one in the garden?"

"No."

"Did Henry Daymon know you possessed the jewels?"

"What do you mean by that, sir?" she flamed, quickly.

"Nothing in the world more than that I am putting purely business inquiries warrantable by my profession."

"Yes, then. I showed him the rare present from my aunt. We enjoyed together the beauty of so rare and precious a gift."

"Thank you. That is all."

Jack Simons left the house, but not the vicinity. He wished to familiarize the premises on the exterior, and began a circuit of the garden wall, examining the gates carefully, but without attracting the attention of any chance-watching eyes. There were three gates, their fastenings stout and of newest pattern. One gate opened on the narrow court at the rear of the garden.

As he returned to the street forming the acute angle with the avenue, he saw Finfin issue from the gate there and start hurriedly away.

He observed that she was tucking something cautiously into her bosom, or feeling of something there to be assured of its safety.

Striding rapidly forward, he soon intercepted her.

"Stop!" he ordered. "I want to speak with you."

"Ah! Monsieur, the detective!"

The girl paused. She was in a perceptible tremor.

"You have in your bosom a note."

"A note!" affected she, surprisedly.

"Yes. Do not try to deceive me. Come, I must see it."

"But if I have a note it is private," she protested.

"Who is its writer?"

"Mademoiselle Cecilia."

"And who is it for?"

you locked up. Remember who I am. Would you like being arrested?"

The threat had the desired effect.

"My mistress made me promise that I would deliver it to no one but the gentleman whose name is on it. Oh! what shall I do now!" she half moaned, drawing the note from her bosom and reluctantly handing it to him.

The envelope was addressed to Henry Daymon. Under the circumstances he felt warranted in opening it. Everything, however slight, in connection with Daymon, was now of interest to him.

"Say nothing, girl," he answered her, somewhat sternly. "Ha! here is a discovery. Yes, you may do and say something. Return to the house. After a proper time has elapsed, go to your mistress, tell her the note was delivered and that there is no answer."

"But such a lie, monsieur!"

"Do you wish to be lodged in jail?"

"No, no!"

"Obey me, then. And, mark you, do not dare to breathe to any one that you have so much as met me. The note I shall keep."

The delicately-perfumed sheet contained this:

"DEAR, DEAR HENRY:—I fear, though am not sure, that you are suspected. You must fly at once. I have but a few minutes to give you this warning. Oh, how could you do it! You must not see me any more. I have been deceived in you. We can now never marry. This warning of your danger, born of the last fading spark of my love for you, must end all between us. I know all; I saw you in the garden. Farewell.

CECILIA."

This certainly savored of a warning to a known culprit from the witness to his criminal act. Could it be possible that Henry Daymon was the guilty party, and Cecilia Allsworth, though aware of the fact, was influenced, by her strong love, to shield rather than expose him?

"So far I have only gotten myself in a tangle," Jack Simons confessed to himself. "It was a strange coincidence that there should be blood-marks both on the jewelry-box and on Finfin's hand; stranger still that a valuable diamond should be found in the girl's room. Her whole appearance is, to me, that of one honestly frightened by the bare suspicion of her being implicated in the robbery. Then here comes the story of Madeline Damer, the governess, about seeing Henry Daymon plainly in the moonlight, in front of the arbor in the garden, inspecting one of the stolen bracelets and commenting on its value. That was about half an hour after parting with his betrothed—time enough to have effected the theft, supposing he could have obtained entrance to the boudoir. Yet, where would be the motive? He was soon to marry Miss Allsworth, and the jewels would go with her. And how, in the name of conscience, could he get into the boudoir? Miss Allsworth carefully locked the only door and carried the key in her pocket; the key was made expressly and peculiarly to order for her; it was, as an unbroken rule, never left in the lock, hence excluding the possibility of an impression having been made of it, supposing the burglar even had an agent in the household. No ordinary man could ascend by the frail water spout from the garden and swing over safely—and back again—to the window sill, fully three feet distant. Finally, here is this note from Miss Allsworth, advising her lover to fly, that he is suspected! I think I shall look after Mr. Henry Daymon to begin with, anyhow."

Proceeding to head-quarters, Simons reported the result of his visit to the mansion on Massachusetts avenue.

"Oh, well," said Mr. Lyon, his chief, after hearing all, "since it is only a matter of 'catch thief,' I guess you can manage it, can't you, Jack? You've generally been a lucky fellow in that field, you know. Work it up. Fifty thousand dollars is considerable of a loss, but it's not worth while putting a whole force of detectives after it. The fewer in, the larger the shares, you know, and you say Allsworth promises liberally. Did you tell him to keep it out of the papers?"

"Yes."

"What will be your first move?"

"First I shall go to work on Henry Daymon."

"And the girl?—Finfin, I believe you said was her name."

"Oh, I do not suspect her in connection with the case. But I cannot forget about the singular coincidence of the blood-stains, and shall have an eye to her doings."

"Work it your own way, Simons. If you need assistance call for it. Stay. Let me tell you something about the man who is to be your employer. John Allsworth's wife, nearly nine years ago, came to reside in Washington for the first time. Her name was Adelia. Carried away by the flatteries of society—and of one rascal in particular—she disappeared. I was detailed on the case, and found that she had gone to Europe with the man who insinuated her away from her husband. At least they were both passengers by the same steamer. His name was Lloyd Ambrose. Three months subsequent John Allsworth learned, by a brief communication from his wife, that she had given birth to a boy-child. And that was the

last he ever heard of her. He has not yet applied for a divorce, strange to say. You will find him a man prompt in his engagements, very affable, but sometimes given to queer, frowning moods that indicate a heavily-weighted mind. It is attributable to the trouble about his wife. That's all I have to say."

Jack Simons left the office for a walk in which to collect his mind for action upon the work ahead. During that walk, however, he ascertained that Henry Daymon was an insurance agent, conducting a highly prosperous business on Seventh street.

CHAPTER III.

THE STOLEN BRACELET.

MR. LYON had remarked that the case was merely one of "catch thief." Little did he or Jack Simons dream that there were other and more startling developments so very soon to follow the mystery of the missing jewels.

A few minutes before four o'clock on that same afternoon Henry Daymon, the young insurance agent, was busily occupied at his office on Seventh street. And while he labored over his books there, an elderly gentleman with a white beard, attired in glossy black, and swinging a gold-headed cane, rung the bell at a private house on Thirteenth street, not a great distance from Rhode Island avenue.

"Does Mr. Henry Daymon board here?"

"No, sir. He has rooms here; takes his meals at the dining saloon on 'F' street, near Ninth."

"Oh! Well, is he in?"

"No, sir."

"How unfortunate for me!"

"You might find him at his office."

"Where is that?"

"No. — Seventh street."

"That is a long way from here. What time does he generally come home?"

"Five o'clock."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed the old gentleman, fidgeting uneasily about on the step. "If I start to find or meet him I may miss him altogether. I am his uncle from Baltimore, my girl. I have an important communication to make to him personally, and yet must catch the six o'clock train out of town. Are you sure he is pretty punctual in his hour for returning?"

"Almost to the minute every day, sir."

"I must see him. I cannot run the risk of missing him. Would there be any objection to my waiting for him?"

The servant scrutinized him closely. At the particular date of this story Washington was universally known to contain unusual numbers of sneak thieves, varied bold and desperate, some pursuing their nefarious modes of subsistence under the garb of apparent gentility. Families were rigidly cautious, especially those having lodgers, as may be safely said to be the case with a great proportion of the residences in that city.

But this elderly "uncle" of Mr. Daymon's could certainly be no other than a gentleman; there was something amiably pleasant in his bold black eyes, too, which carried assurance.

"I suppose there won't be any harm, sir," said the door-maid, reflectively. "Walk in. Mr. Daymon has parlor and bedroom. You can be seated in the parlor until he comes."

A few minutes later he was shown to and left alone in the room of the young insurance agent.

Instantly there was a great change in his manner.

Instead of taking a seat, he darted quick, inquisitive glances round, being presently arrested by a plain desk at one side.

"I have hardly an hour. My work must be done quickly," broke hushedly from his lips.

The voice was Jack Simons's.

He advanced to the desk. As he very naturally expected, it was locked.

"I can soon overcome that little difficulty, I guess," he uttered, confidently, when he had tried the front.

Producing a small iron chisel from an inner pocket, as if prepared for this very emergency, he drove the instrument into the vertical line formed by the joining of the two doors, and using the palm of his hand as a hammer, there was scarcely any noise.

Another instant, and the contents of the desk were before him.

Though he might have been less surprised, because of the knowledge he possessed—which pointed seriously to Daymon as the purloiner of the Allsworth jewels—he could not repress a start at what lay revealed to him.

Almost the first thing he saw was a magnificent solid-gold bracelet, very broad, with delicate black-enameled edges, and amid a profusion of leafy chasing brilliantly gleamed several diamonds.

Jack Simons knew that an accurate description of that identical bracelet was at that moment in his diary, given him by John Allsworth in the morning.

It was undoubtedly one of the missing pieces of jewelry.

As he took up and closely examined the bauble ornament, he saw that the top of the band had been set with four diamonds. Now it had

but three. The fourth spot of mounting was empty.

While thus viewing it he made a sudden discovery. The young detective had an extraordinary good memory.

It was instantly revealed to him that the diamonds remaining in the bracelet were cut in a precisely similar fashion to the one found in Finfin's bed-chamber; to the best of his recollection it was the same size as these, would have fitted neatly into the empty puncture, the tiny clinchers around the edges of which were bent outward, as if the stone had been roughly torn out.

"This almost looks to me," he mused, "as if there was something going on between the two—Daymon and Finfin. Theory No. 1: Finfin was Daymon's agent in the house: notwithstanding Miss Allsworth's carelessness, the girl somehow obtained an impression of the key, entered the boudoir, pried open the box—hence the blood-mark, which may have been an accidental scratch during the operation—then dropped the jewelry to Daymon in the garden below. For I am ready to make oath that no man could ascend and gain the window by the water-spout. I shall let it rest here for the present," replacing the bracelet in the same position as he had found it. "If I take it he would be sure to notice its absence. I must do nothing to alarm him until I am fully ready to establish his guilt and, above all, find out where the rest of the jewelry is. He cannot have pawned any of it already, for I have 'posted' every money-lender in town. What else is here, now?"

Several packages of letters were next overhauled, which were in turn carefully restored to their original places in the pigeon-holes.

Henry Daymon was as particular in private matters as in office business. All letters were scrupulously filed with comprehensive indorsements.

Simon's quick eyes and dexterous fingers made excellent use of that short hour before the return of the suspected man.

Aside from any personal danger attending his actions, the detective feared discovery which might cause his game to fly ere the meshes of investigation were woven strong enough to hold securely.

Presently he came upon a package marked:

"Private. Dangerous. To be destroyed."

An exclamation of satisfaction, then astonishment, broke from his lips as he drew forth and perused one of these. It held an important revelation—a key to another mystery.

He looked at his watch. It was a quarter to five.

"I dare not risk another minute here," was his thought. "These letters I shall take with me, running chances of his not detecting their abstraction."

Having first, with his penknife, re-screwed the small bottom hook of one door and pushing it back—for his forcible opening of the desk had dragged out this hook—he then brought the upper lock to a fitting position, and closed both doors simultaneously. With a piece of pale-brown substance which he had, the single white mark on the varnish, where the chisel had entered, was obliterated.

When Daymon opened the desk, he would surely imagine that he had locked the doors, forgetting to fasten the bottom hook.

Simons went to the table and laid thereon a pale-tinted envelope addressed to Henry Daymon. It was a *fac-simile* of the one that had contained the note he intercepted and took from Finfin. Its superscription was an admirable imitation of Cecilia Allsworth's writing.

"Let us see what my bird will do when he reads that." With which utterance he left the room.

At the foot of the stairs, coming up, was the servant who had admitted him.

"You are not going, sir?"

"Yes. It is imperative. I have a long way to go to the depot, and I must catch the train without fail."

"But Mr. Daymon will be here in a few minutes, now."

"I have written a note for him, which must answer for the present. Please call his attention to it—on the table in his private parlor. Sorry I cannot wait any longer."

He hurried from the house and reached and turned a corner without having met Henry Daymon, who was then on his way to his rooms.

Safe in Jack Simons's pocket was the package of letters which, he judged by his cursory glance at one of them, promised to reveal something unexpectedly startling in connection with the character of the young insurance agent.

CHAPTER IV.

A KNIFE THRUST.

PUNCTUALLY according to habit, Henry Daymon entered the house where he had his rooms nearly on the minute of five o'clock.

In the lower hall he encountered the door-maid.

"There was a gentleman to see you, sir," she said.

"Yes? When?"

"He's only been gone a few minutes. He seemed like he wanted to say something par-

ticular to you. He had to catch the train, he said, and couldn't wait; though I told him it wouldn't be long before you was in. He waited up-stairs for you awhile."

Daymon regarded her steadily at this.

"What was his name?"

It now occurred to the girl that she had been very negligent in not having ascertained the stranger's name.

"Indeed, I forgot to ask, sir," she replied confusedly; "but he said he was your uncle from Baltimore."

"Uncle from Baltimore!" he exclaimed in surprise. "My girl, I have no uncle in Baltimore, nor anywhere else in the world."

The girl was now in turn astonished. She paled with vague alarm.

"I hope I haven't done wrong, sir."

"How—in what way?"

"By showing him up-stairs."

"Did you do that?"

"Yes."

"How long did he remain there?"

"Nearly three quarters of an hour."

"Heavens! what if he was a sneak-thief and has found—"

Daymon checked himself. Brushing in agitation past her, he ascended swiftly to his room.

He went straight to the desk, unlocking and opening the doors.

"Hal! I forgot to make fast this bottom hook!" was his instant exclamation.

But he breathed relievedly at seeing the bracelet in its nook.

"If it had been a sneak-thief who came here, how easy for him to have opened these doors and stolen this precious trinket."

He paused a moment, gazing upon the jewel-blazing ornament.

"But what can it mean? I have no uncle at all—all on my father's and mother's side died some time ago. I cannot understand—"

"If you please, Mr. Daymon—"

The servant stood in the doorway. She, too, had gazed upon the sparkling, gemmy bracelet.

"Well, what is it?"

"The gentleman left a note that you would find on the center-table."

"Ah! here it is. What else? Any further message?"

"No, sir."

"That will do then—you may go. There does not appear to be anything missing. But in future, as it seems necessary for you to have a key to put the rooms in order, admit no one here when I am absent."

As the servant withdrew there was a strange, excited light in her eyes. Vividly before her, stamped indelibly—as such things generally are on the female mind—was that momentary vision of the gorgeous bracelet with its fiery glistening gems.

"It is from Cecilia," he uttered, lowly, with a pleased smile, as he took up the dainty missive and scanned the familiar chirography of its address.

The next instant he staggered back—clapping one hand to his brow; the smile faded from his face, leaving it white, astounded, incredulous of expression.

What he read was this:

"HENRY:—You must not see me any more. I have been deceived in you. We can now never marry. I know all. Farewell. CECILIA."

It was the identical note Simons had taken from Finfin. But by the use of a certain fluid he had obliterated the two endearing words preceding Henry's name; also, as the reader will observe, a portion of the sentences at both top and bottom. The width of the erasures between prefix and signature being nearly equal, the blank spaces there had the appearance of being intentional.

"Heavens! what can she mean? She 'knows all.' All of what? I have done nothing, as I am a living man, unworthy of my vows to her, or anything meriting her displeasure."

These were not the utterances to be expected from a guilty man!

Then he flushed; his brow clouded with a frown.

"And this was brought by the party who falsely represented himself as my 'uncle.' So. There is something deeper in his visit than I can fathom at present. But have it explained I will, depend. Cecilia is wrong; she has made some grave mistake which of course I can easily clear up when I see her this evening. Some enemy perhaps—though it is beyond me to imagine who—has been poisoning her mind with gossip stories."

At eight o'clock in the evening, having arranged his customarily elaborate toilet, the young insurance agent called, as was his regular wont, at the mansion on Massachusetts avenue.

"Miss Allsworth begs to say that she is engaged," informed the servant, who, while holding the door open, stood blocking the entrance.

"But, my good fellow, I hardly think that will apply to me. Please say to her that Mr. Daymon—"

"Beg pardon, sir. It is to Mr. Daymon in particular that I am to say Miss Allsworth is

too occupied to see him," broke in the servant, politely but firm.

With a tumultuous heart Henry Daymon turned from the steps.

"What is this mystery?" he muttered, pained and perplexed.

He walked slowly away in the moonlight, with bowed head, like one hardly realizing that he was really awake.

As he passed a bronzed gate in the garden wall he caught sight of a face pressed between the bars.

"Finfin!"

"Monsieur Daymon," returned the girl, modestly.

"A word with you, Finfin."

"What will monsieur have?"

"It seems that Miss Allsworth, your mistress, is too busily engaged to see visitors this evening. I wished to see her particularly, as I have something belonging to her. I came by it under most singular circumstances, which I will tell to you, so that you may repeat the same to her. The article is quite valuable; she may miss it and become very much alarmed. You must take it to her, Finfin, and tell her what I relate to you concerning how it came into my possession—besides mentioning my regrets that I was debarred from the pleasure of returning it in person. At the same time, Finfin, warn her to be a little more careful in the future as to the way she lays aside her jewelry."

When leaving his rooms, with the intention of visiting his betrothed, Daymon had slipped the bracelet loosely into an inner pocket.

Taking it forth now, he extended it to Finfin through the bars.

He was overcome by astonishment at what followed, as the moonlight fell upon the precious thing, producing a brilliant effect of flashes.

No sooner did Finfin's eyes rest upon it, than she uttered a short, gasping cry, wheeled abruptly and fled away from the gate.

"What the deuce ails the girl! Finfin—here—come back!" he called, but to no purpose.

She paid no heed to his voice, soon vanishing amid the ornamental trees, and presently the bang of a closing door indicated that she had entered the house.

"Is the girl crazy? She acts like a fool, I must say."

An ominous voice sounded close to his ear.

"It is monsieur who is ze fool!"

He turned—to find a dagger poised close above his heart, grasped by a gloved hand.

Behind the weapon gleamed a pair of small, cunning, menacing eyes—the eyes belonging to a man shabbily garbed, with a slouch hat low on his forehead, and who had approached, unobserved, with the stealth and swiftness of a cat.

"It is monsieur who is ze fool," repeated the owner of the snaky eyes, holding the dagger ready to strike. "Ha! take care, you! Eef you try to draw ze pistol I make of you a dead man in ze instant!"

"What do you want, fellow?"

"Softly. Not so loud. Ze people will hear."

"By heaven! I want them to hear. Stand aside!"

"Take care—take care!" sibilated the man.

There was murder in those twinkling, scintillating eyes.

"Monsieur will allow me to state ze fact zat I am in a much hurry."

"Say your say, then, and be off. The sooner the better."

Daymon was no coward. He did not wince a particle before the uplifted and deadly-bright knife, and looked straight into the other's shadowed face. But he realized, at his present disadvantage, that it would be folly to attempt to draw his pistol for defense.

"I have say zat monsieur is ze fool. He carry ze jewels—ze magnificent jewels—about in his pocket. Ze bracelet, monsieur."

"Well, what about it?"

"Ah! how possible you do not comprehend! You will give it to me."

"What! You scoundrel!"

"Ze bracelet—quick!" came a whispering, threatening hiss.

"Never!"

"But you will—"

"I will see you hanged first!"

The gloved hand tightened its grip on the dagger.

"Vous vous trompez. I shall count ze un, deux, trois. When I shall say ze five times, if monsieur has not given me ze bracelet—sacre! —I will stab him to deat'!"

"You infamous rascal! You do not dare—"

"I count, monsieur."

With which remark, accented with horrible, mocking suavity, the fellow began to count slowly:

"Un—deux—"

"Would you murder me?"

"J'en ai encore le couer gros."

There was no mistaking the murderous sincerity of that voice.

But Henry Daymon was not the man to readily yield up the precious bracelet which he knew belonged to his betrothed.

The highwayman had reached "quatre" in his curdling count; already on his tongue was forming the fatal "cinq."

Concentrating his whole strength, the young insurance agent, by a quick, expert movement, dashed aside the dagger-blade, and threw himself on the man.

But he had miscalculated regarding his foe.

Sinewy, supple, no doubt an adept at his nefarious practice, the Frenchman eel'd from under his assailant's clutching grasp with a lightning-like movement.

The next second there sounded a hard, dull thud.

Daymon felt a shaft of cold, stinging steel enter his flesh, and, with a cry, recoiled, sinking to the pavement.

As he went down, he felt a rough hand tearing at his inner coat pocket. His senses reeled in helpless confusion.

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE GAINS AN OBJECT.

HENRY DAYMON, totally oblivious of the fact, was a closely-shadowed man.

When he started for the Allsworth mansion, there was a keen-eyed figure on his track; when he conversed with Finfin at the gate—and when he was confronted by the cool and desperate highwayman—this figure was near, crouching in and concealed by the shade of the high brown-stone steps.

The distance between the steps and the gate was such that the stealthy trailer could not distinguish a word of the dialogue either with the girl, or, afterward, with the man; neither did he see the sparkle of the jeweled bracelet; the gleam of the threatening knife was hidden from his view because the form of the young man was between him and the robber.

But the blow and the fall Jack Simons did see, and instantly sprung forward.

By the time he reached the prostrate victim, the assassin had lit from sight around the corner of the garden-wall, into the court at the rear.

The stranger wore a high, light-colored felt hat, a light sack coat, English whiskers, and carried a dainty cane.

Daymon writhed on the pavement. He was severely hurt but not unconscious.

"I hope you are not wounded badly, sir."

"I cannot say. He struck here with his knife," indicating his shoulder.

"The villain! I saw the dastardly deed and hastened to your assistance, but too late, it seems."

"Where is the wretch?"

"Whisked off—gone! Do you think you are able to rise? Let me aid you. My name is Smyrck—Jerry Smyrck—"

He was interrupted by a cry from the young man, who started, staggering to his feet. He had, the instant he collected his senses, felt nervously of his inside pocket.

It was empty! The bracelet was gone!

"Of course some action will have to be taken in this matter," pursued the stranger, ignorant of the cause of the other's exclamation, but attributing it to the pain of the wound occasioned by the movement. "It will not do for such a bloody-minded fellow as that to be at large. He must be found and jugged."

"Found!" burst from Daymon, in great agitation. "Ay, he must be apprehended at any cost!"

"That's it. I like to see such brutes dealt with determinedly."

"He has succeeded in robbing me of something that, besides its being of great value, I would not have parted with for the world."

"May I ask what it was?"

"No matter. But I shall depend upon you to—"

"Certainly. I am at your service if the fellow is caught. I am stopping at the St. James. But your wound? That needs attention."

Daymon knew that he was bleeding. The immediate service of a physician was imperative.

"Let me assist you, sir. You are weak from this shock."

"If you will be so kind. My name is Daymon. I live at No. — Thirteenth street."

"Oh, that is not far. Come, I shall accompany you."

Leaning on the sustaining arm of Jerry Smyrck, the young insurance-agent was soon at his rooms, where his wound was examined.

The assassin's knife had entered and slashed a little below the shoulder, inflicting an ugly but—as Smyrck cheerily remarked—by no means a deep or fatal thrust.

"Get yourself into bed, Mr. Daymon. I will summon the landlady, who had better remain with you while I go for a doctor."

"You are very kind," said Daymon, gratefully.

Within half an hour the physician was at his bedside.

"Not a dangerous wound at all," he pronounced. "But for fear of exciting a fever, I would advise your keeping to your couch for a time. In that case you should have a nurse or attendant."

"How fortunate!" exclaimed Jerry Smyrck, almost eagerly. "I have an intimate friend who has seen considerable hospital service—a man. He would suit exactly."

"For male patients I rather prefer a man nurse," declared the doctor.

"Then, if Mr. Daymon does not object—" "I am willing and thankful for anything you are kind enough to suggest."

"By the by, would you recognize your assailant if you saw him again?"

"No, I fear not."

"What a pity! It will be up-hill work to catch him, then."

"But I tell you he shall be caught, if it takes the last dollar I have in the world and leaves me in poverty."

"It must have been something valuable, indeed, that he took."

"It was."

"If there was only some item in his appearance—"

"His back was to the moonlight; his face was additionally shaded by a large-rimmed hat. I could make out nothing distinctly but a pair of small eyes that were like a very serpent's. I am sure, however, that he was a Frenchman."

"Why not advertise a reward and no questions asked?"

"I have strong reasons for preferring not. As soon as I am able I will see detectives—Stay, a delay may result in the loss of the article forever. Would you also be so kind as to summon one of those professional gentlemen to me?"

"With pleasure. And now, good-night. I will send the nurse."

He proceeded straightway to the St. James and registered—showing that Jerry Smyrck had lied a little when declaring that he was already stopping there.

"It will be all square in that direction, in the event of an inquiry," he muttered, as, after remaining in his room for the brief space of five minutes, he left the hotel. "And now to see about the nurse who is to attend Daymon. It must be somebody who can properly play into my game."

He turned down Sixth street as far as the B. & P. R. R. depôt, thence to the right along the narrow street there. With the exception of a saloon or two, the locality had a spectral air of desolation.

As he walked along, Jerry Smyrck performed a very singular feat.

Taking off his hat he rammed it inside out—not wholly, but converting it into a low-crown, square-top stiff of black color; then off came the whiskers, and in their stead a heavy black mustache was adjusted to the lip. He removed his coat, turning it and redressing it. Its color now was black, and coat-tails, that had been pinned up, now dropped, making it frock pattern.

Jerry Smyrck had vanished. During the transformation his identity was revealed as Jack Simons, the detective.

"John Smedley, Esq.," he muttered, to himself, and the voice was neither that of Simons nor Smyrck.

In this altered disguise he emerged upon Pennsylvania avenue at Seventh street, took a car going west and soon entered the agency on Fifteenth street.

He found his chief there alone, enjoying a cigar and newspaper.

"Hello, Smedley!"

Lyon was familiar with this disguise of his assistant and also the name assumed with it.

"How do you progress?"

"First class, so far."

"How?"

"I have formed a very friendly acquaintance with my game."

"Good. Anything else?"

"Nothing to unload at present."

Which the astute chief knew to mean that Simons, even in that short time, had accomplished some work which he purposed keeping to himself until the proper moment.

"Mr. Lyon, I want a nurse."

"A nurse! Why, what in the name of—" "Henry Daymon was stabbed to-night."

"The deuce!—fatally?"

"No. Keep it shady, though. I have obtained the promises of the landlady, the physician and himself to maintain strictest secrecy regarding the occurrence and his condition, as the only means of enabling detectives to get on the track of the would-be assassin."

"What was the difficulty?"

"Merely a bold robbery on the open street, I judge. But it has brought me into friendly relations with Daymon. I happened to be on hand—just in time to be too late to save him from the thrust. He wants a detective employed immediately. I have an object in wishing to handle this new case, also. But about the nurse?"

"When is she wanted?"

"He? It must be a man whom I may use."

"Oh, I see."

"I want him as soon as possible."

"Well, I guess we can easily arrange for Hush!"

His utterance broke short with a warning whisper.

Both glanced surprised toward the doorway.

A rather tall lady had entered. She was clad plainly but neatly in a dark suit; her face was completely hidden by a thick veil.

"Is this the office of Messrs. Lyon & Gatch?" she inquired.

"Yes, madam."

"I have come on business."

"My name is Lyon. Be seated, please."

"You are engaged in connection with the disappearance of the Allsworth jewels, I believe."

The chief merely looked at her steadily, without answering.

At which, after the pause, she drew aside her veil, saying:

"My name is Madeline Damer. I am governess to Mr. Allsworth's little daughter, Amy."

"Ah!" Lyon vouchsafed, politely.

"I called more expressly to see the gentleman who is working on this case—his name is Simons, I understand."

The two detectives exchanged glances.

"He is in the back room, now," promptly spoke the disguised Simons.

"Call him in, Mr. Smedley," said Lyon.

"I will. And as I do not seem to be wanted here I'll just slip out at the side door. Good-evening, Mr. Lyon."

"Good-evening, sir. Call again."

Entering the rear room, Simons removed his disguise in a twinkling, then returned to the outer office *in propria persona*, wearing a cap, and having changed his coat back to its light-colored sack pattern.

"I understand you wish to see me?" addressing Miss Damer.

"Yes."

"Step this way, please."

He felt satisfied that her visit concerned the case of the Allsworth jewels in some way. Detective-like, he considered any or all information, connected with the matter on which he was detailed, his own private property until the investigation should reach the point for "closing in."

They retired to the rear room. He placed a chair for her.

CHAPTER VI.

JACK'S FAIR PARTNER.

"Is your visit in relation to the Allsworth jewels, Miss Damer?"

"It is."

"Have you made any discoveries?"

"I think so."

"What have you to communicate?"

"Something I saw to-night, which is surely worthy of your attention."

"Please proceed."

"Awhile after dark I was crossing the garden to procure a twig of *arbor vitæ*, when I heard voices and saw two forms at one of the gates. One was Finfin, Miss Allsworth's maid, the other a man whose voice had a decided French accent. Let me repeat, as near as I can remember, the dialogue between them."

The detective listened with deep interest. Henry Daymon had averred that his murderous assailant was a Frenchman.

Very clearly, and with an admirable imitation of the two distinct parts, Madeline Damer related the following as having passed between Finfin and the man at the gate:

"Aha! Finfin, my pretty, you are here."

"Yes, for you promised to come."

"I have keep ze agreement."

"Give me the paper, now," anxiously.

"Parbleu! how fast. Wait a leetle."

"You brought it?"

"Yes. I have it alway wiz me."

"Then give it to me."

"Not yet, my Finfin."

"What! Monsieur Jacques, you are quite wicked, but you would not perjure yourself?"

"Ah! no."

"You swore, the night you spoke to me at the side door, that if I would just so much as tell you where ma'mselle, my mistress's window opened upon the garden, it would be the last time I should have to serve you, and that you would return to me the paper to set me free from you."

"C'est vrai. But, my pretty, I have a note all of what I t'ink I would get. You admit to me zat ma'msel e have of ze jewels a ne lace, a breastpin, ear-rings and two bracelets—eh?"

"Yes, I saw them plainly—all."

"A—well. Lepo, my good, sly Lepo, he bring to me not two but one of ze bracelets. Ha! Lepo is vair smart. You know zat. To him you owe your liberty from ze ugly prison in France—eh? He would not have leave behind ze ot'er bracelet, so shiny wiz ze diamon', oh, no! Zis time you have not serve me faithful, Finfin."

"Oh! I am tired of this life!" groaned the girl, wringing her hands. "Give me the paper, Jacques, as you vowed you would."

"But ze bracelet—ze ot'er bracelet?"

"I know not where it is."

"Ah! you are so cunning, Finfin. You t'ink zat you will keep zat yourself—eh?"

"But I swear to you I k'ow nothing of it."

"You mean zat for true?"

"Yes."

"Tis vair strange."

"Now give me the paper, Jacques."

Madeline Damer here resumed in her own way:

"Just then the man uttered a warning hiss and vanished. In a few seconds a other man stepped to the gate. This last was Henry Daymon. They addressed each other, but then their voices sunk so low I could not hear anything further. When they had evidently exchanged a few words, Henry Daymon produced and held toward her the bracelet I have described as being in his hand when I saw him standing before the arbor in the same hour in which the robbery occurred. The girl, from some cause, uttered a cry and fled to the house. At the same time Mr. Daymon stepped very suddenly away from the gate. There was no further sound, and I left the spot. Now, Mr. Simons, I have some theories."

"What are they?"

"There is a league of robbers in this city. Henry Daymon is in the league. There is something between Daymon and Finfin. Perhaps Daymon is the head and genius. The Frenchman, Jacques—whatever he may be, if that is his real name—is also in the league; he has a personal and remarkable assistant in some one called Lepo."

Jack Simons had begun walking the room thoughtfully while she was speaking. Could it be that he was on an entirely wrong scent? A complication was presented. It looked as if Finfin and Jacques, the Frenchman—judging by what Madeline Damer exposed—were more likely to be the guilty parties he should be after.

"In one thing you are mistaken," at last he said.

"What is that?"

"I feel sure there can be no criminal connection between Daymon and the Frenchman."

"Tell me why you think so?"

"Because that same Frenchman stabbed and robbed him to-night."

And to himself he added: "Ten to one the article Daymon lost was that very bracelet. I shall soon know."

Pausing directly before her and regarding her keenly, he said:

"You seem to take an extraordinary interest in this affair, Miss Damer."

"Granted."

"What is your object, pray?"

"Vengeance!" she declared, with flashing eyes.

This was an astonisher. His brows raised.

"Vengeance? Upon whom—for what?"

"Upon Henry Daymon."

"What has he done to you?"

"To me direct—nothing. But he has wronged one who is very dear to me."

"This is a riddle."

"Henry Daymon has no right to marry Cecilia Allsworth."

"Why?"

"He has a wife already living."

Astonisher No. 2.

"You are strangely posted," he expressed himself.

"It is not strange. It is natural that I should be. That wronged wife—and she has been terribly wronged—is my own sister."

"Whew!"

"Mr. Simons, I want you to take me into this case with you."

Astonisher No. 3.

"I am sure I can be of great service," she urged. "I will have a double motive. I still am firm in my conviction that Henry Daymon is concerned in the disappearance of the jewels. His face, to me, plainly bears the stamp of a burdened mind."

He smiled.

"I know what you would say," she continued, rapidly. "You suppose that I, a woman, cannot possibly have any knowledge of what is required for the detective business. You err. I believe I inherit capabilities for that especial vocation. My father, William Damer, was a noted detective located in the city of Richmond for many years."

"But, Miss Damer, your position as governess in Mr. Allsworth's house? His case may terminate abruptly, and you be out of a situation?"

"Pah! Do you suppose I am dependent upon that? I have been there scarcely a month. Let me tell you my story. When my father died my sister and myself were all that remained of the family. He left property sufficient for our support without any need of our working out a livelihood. But I was not born for an idle life. I obtained a position as teacher in a private school. One day I returned to my home to find my sister gone. She had eloped with a man who called himself Robert Donald. Why my sister, Cora, had eloped to marry him, I could not then imagine. I have since theorized correctly as to

the cause. I had never seen the man; he always timed his visits so as to avoid me. He was afraid to bear the scrutiny of a sister whom Coralie glowingly described to him as an apt face-reader. Within three months Coralie returned to me broken-hearted. The villain had deserted her, having first informed her that the marriage was a mock ceremony. He either stole or destroyed her certificate. I will not weary you with innumerable details as to how I accomplished it, but let it suffice that for three years I have been a close shadow on that man's trail, with his photograph in my pocket; in my pursuit I discovered that his real name was Daymon—his baptismal name seemed to be the same: Robert. I also secured indisputable proofs that the marriage was perfectly valid. At last I tracked him to Washington, found him to be the affianced of Cecilia Allsworth. By a stroke of fortune, the little child, Amy, was to be placed under the care of a new governess; after some difficulty I attained to the position."

"What description of vengeance have you been thinking of?" Simons asked, when she paused.

"I have not decided."

"But how can you be sure that this Daymon is really your man?"

"Judge for yourself."

She drew from her bosom a photograph and handed it to him.

The face bore a marked resemblance to Daymon's, though not exactly like it. The similarity of name, too, however, was a strong point.

In a few seconds of silence Jack Simons was thinking rapidly.

He remembered well the name of Damer as prominent among Richmond detectives; his brief acquaintance with Madeline had impressed him that she was a shrewd, persevering woman, with extraordinary nerve, business qualification and tenacity.

Suddenly a bright idea struck him.

"I have a notion to take you into this affair as an active partner, Miss Damer," he said.

"I wish you would."

"Even if we suppose that Henry Daymon is not implicated in the burglary at the Allsworth mansion, I have made other discoveries that fully warrant my keeping him under surveillance."

As he thus spoke, Simons had in mind certain suspicious revelations contained in the package of letters we have seen him abstract from Daymon's desk.

Madeline Damer did not inquire what these discoveries were.

"With my motive and self-confidence, guided by your experience and instruction," she rejoined, "I think I can be of valuable service both in your cause and my own. I would like to rightly fasten this crime upon him as part of my vengeance for his treatment of Coralie."

"Are you good at disguises?"

"Try me."

"I have told you that Mr. Daymon was stabbed to-night. He is not wounded fatally, but is confined to his bed. He requires an attendant; it must be a man—and I require that the man shall be there as my spy. You comprehend. Are you equal to it?"

"I am," was the prompt reply.

"Have you such a disguise convenient?"

"Yes."

"When can you report for duty?"

"Within two hours."

"Very well. Come here in that time and I will have instructions for you. I must first see you and satisfy myself of your abilities."

"Have no fear on that score."

Madeline Damer left the agency.

Simons, returning to the outer office, remarked to his chief:

"I have secured the nurse I wanted."

"Who?"

"Miss Damer"

"But you want a man!"

"She says she can 'make up.' You remember old Damer, of Richmond?"

"Yes, indeed."

"His daughter. I think she will do."

Around the corner Madeline Damer had a hock in waiting. Stepping into this, she was whirled away, soon arriving at the Allsworth mansion.

It was then after eleven o'clock.

The serving man had admitted her and was reclosing the massive door, when both stood stock still and stared at each other with whitened faces.

For at that instant a shriek rung through the whole house, so piercing and prolonged that it nigh froze the blood in their veins.

It was a scream of mingled pain and terror.

This was followed by a patter of many running footsteps in the second story—then silence, utter, gravelike.

Evidently something terrible must have transpired to produce such a blood-curdling sound.

CHAPTER VII.

A BLOODY MYSTERY.

RECOVERING from the shock occasioned by

the soul-thrilling shriek, Madeline Damer hastened up the broad staircase.

The serving-man, aroused by her action, followed closely.

On the landing at the second floor she half-halted at seeing several forms congregated around a doorway in the entry ahead of her.

It was Cecilia Allsworth's bedchamber.

Around John Allsworth were crowding half-a-dozen servants; the faces of all wore the whiteness of affright; they stood as if riveted, petrified, gazing inward through the open doorway, from whence issued a flood of light and the sound of low, hysterical words and scbs.

For an instant Madeline's pulse fluttered in the vague surmises of her brain—an instant only; then she advanced with remarkable calmness.

Never could she forget the spectacle that burst upon her as she pushed her way forward and looked into that room.

The bed curtains were torn in shreds from their supports; chairs were overturned, the whole apartment was in dire confusion, with articles of wearing-apparel scattered in disorder, indicating a recent and desperate struggle.

In the center of all this, the chief, horrifying object, lay Cecilia Allsworth full length, partially disrobed, motionless as if dead.

Her bare arms were lacerated and bruised, the opulence of her pale golden hair was disheveled, tangled, flowing on the floor; on the top of her head was a bloody clot, below which, on the rich carpeting was a round, broad, red stain.

Finfin, the maid, was kneeling beside her prostrate mistress, her hands clasped tightly. Her dusky face was a ghastly picture of dismay and terror, and she sobbed, cried by spasms, calling to Cecilia as one who wails hopelessly in the presence of a loved dead.

Then:

"My God!" burst, in a gasping accent, from John Allsworth.

The words broke the frozen spell that held them all. They rushed, in one impulse, into the apartment.

"My child!—my child! Speak to me!" groaned Allsworth, lifting the beautiful, blood-bruised head in his arms.

But there was no answer. Another, a deep, feeling silence came over those who gazed.

Cecilia could not be dead. There was just the slightest throb of the pulse that was eagerly felt of. Though her deep blue eyes were wide, starting, staring, and every lineament as if turned to stone, it was not the glassy stare of death; on either cheek glowed a spot of crimson.

"She is not dead, but badly hurt, that is evident. Place her on the bed, some of you," commanded the practical voice of Madeline Damer. She was obeyed.

Allsworth, quivering in every fiber, bent over the still form. The staring blue eyes fixed suddenly upon him. Long, long they gazed; but at last a new light, of recognition, entered the distended orbs, the lids relaxed slowly, her colorless lips moved.

Closer he stooped to catch the faintest word she might pronounce.

"Is it gone?"

"What—who, my child?"

"The horrible, horrible thing."

"There is nothing here to harm you."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes. I am with you, my dear child."

She reached and took one of his hands in hers, clinging to it lightly.

"Do not leave me."

"Be sure I shall not. Tell me what has happened, if you can."

The inquiry seemed to recall a torture to her mind. She struggled inwardly for a moment, as if the words she would utter choked her. Then, apparently altering her intended speech, she turned her piteous face toward the wall and moaned, with a great sob:

"Oh! I know—I know, now, where my jewels have gone!"

"Where? What are you saying, my child?" he asked, eagerly.

But she did not hear. She had fainted.

"Quick, here, some of you! Water! Good heavens! see how her head is bleeding! Oh, my child!"

There were prompt hands to answer, with the half-paralyzing effect of the bloody mystery.

Meantime, Madeline Damer had crossed to Cecilia's escritoire and, seating herself composedly indited a brief missive. Beckoning Sam, the hall-man, and giving a sealed note into his hand, she said:

"Take this instantly to No. — Fifteenth street, the detective agency of Lyon & Gatch, and ask for Mr. Simons. There, now, do not stop for anything, but be off—on wings, I may say."

"Yes, miss."

As the man departed speedily, John Allsworth turned, saying:

"We must summon the police at once."

"Do nothing of the kind, Mr. Allsworth," returned Madeline.

"Why? True we are in the dark as to what has taken place, though this is the undoubted

work of a would-be assassin. Cecilia will presently recover. We must unearth the cause of this marvelous occurrence—"

He was interrupted by Madeline.

"The police are not the persons we wish to see in this instance."

"Who then? We must not be idle. Something—"

"I would strongly suggest that it demands the services of detectives."

"Ah! yes, you are right. Send for detectives at once."

"I have already done so."

"You are prompt in an emergency, Miss Damer. While everybody is too excited to think or act, you are notably calm. I am glad of it. My brain is all awhirl. Do you think my daughter seriously hurt?"

Madeline went to the bed and carefully examined the wounds on Cecilia's arms and head. These had been tenderly bathed clean by Finfin who, with a world of woe in her face, seemed bordering on a frenzy in her desire to do everything for her young mistress.

The hazel eyes of the governess were covertly noting the girl's behavior.

"No, I do not think so, Mr. Allsworth."

"Thank God for that!"

"She has been frightened nearly out of her senses, however, I may safely surmise; but the wounds are nothing—mere ugly scratches. Even the blow on her head seems to have been a glancing one, no more than breaking the skin."

"How upon earth could it have happened? What can it mean?"

"Who can guess? I heard your daughter moan aloud that she now knew where her jewels had gone."

"True. I had almost forgotten it."

"We must wait for the detective and until Miss Allsworth has sufficiently revived to tell her story.

Mr. Lyon, chief of the bureau of private detectives, was alone when Sam, the hall servant from the Allsworth mansion entered the office in a flush and flutter of excitement.

"Is this the office of Lyon & Gatch, sir?"

"It is."

"Where is Mr. Simons?"

"Out at present."

"I have a note here for him."

"Important?"

"I should say it was. There's been a lady murdered, looks like."

"Who—where?"

"Miss Allsworth, who lives on Massachusetts avenue."

"Give me the note. My name is Lyon—chief of this bureau."

Tearing open the missive he read:

"MR. SIMONS:—Come directly to the Allsworth mansion. Your services are freshly needed. Cecilia Allsworth has just been found in her bedroom half-murdered. She has been badly hurt and is now unconscious. Do not delay."

M. D."

Lyon reflected for a moment.

"That signature means Madeline Damer. Simons is wanted. He is working the Allsworth jobs; he had better look after this, also."

Then to the man: "You may return and say that Mr. Simons will come immediately."

"All right, sir."

As the man departed, Lyon proceeded to place the brief communication in a new envelope, directing it to John Smedley, esq., care of Henry Daymon, No. — Fifteenth street, near Rhode Island avenue, after which he touched the messenger alarm-bell.

In exactly four minutes a representative of the A. D. Telegraph company entered the office.

But upon this representative the detective gazed in some astonishment. It was a lad not much above three feet high, and certainly not over nine years of age. His eyes were bright, intelligent; he wore his uniform like a little prince in royal decoration.

"Did you call, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, what's the message?" he demanded, short and businesslike.

Of such intense import was the message Lyon wished to transmit to Simons, that he felt some hesitation in intrusting it to this diminutive courier.

"How old are you, my lad?"

"Old enough to know my business, I reckon," was the reply.

"How long have you been in the employ of the company?"

"Long enough to suit 'em and get a promoted salary."

"You are rather sharp for your years, anyhow."

"Well, I ain't just a flat, I know—bein' respectful to you, sir. But say, that ain't what I'm here for—to answer conundrums. What do you want?"

"I have a very important note I want you to deliver."

The lad drew forth his book, which he laid, open, on the desk and extended a pencil.

"Write down the address and put the note inside."

When Lyon had done this, the boy read it and said:

"Sixty cents. Car fare in, you know. Any answer?"

"No—Hold up! yes. Come back and let me see the gentleman's signature."

"All right."

Away went the boy, with a running skip.

"Quite young, but deuced smart, I take it. Reads quick, too," Lyon commented, to himself.

In due time there was a peremptory ring at the bell of No. — Fifteenth street. The servant, answering the summons, had almost stoop over to see who it was on the steps.

"Does Mr. Daymon live here?"

"Yes, he does."

"Is there a gentleman with him named John Smedley, Esq.?"

"There's some gentleman with him. I don't know his name."

"Tell him I want to see him. Hurry up."

"Aren't you too peart-spoken for a boy of your size—?"

"Skip out, now. I'm a limited express, I am. My time's val'ble."

In a few minutes the disguised Simons—who had returned to Henry Daymon's side in the rôle of John Smedley, detective—was at the door. Satisfying the boy that he was the proper person, he received and read the startling communication from Madeline Damer.

"It's all right. No answer," he said, with a nod.

"No, 'tain't all right yet. Please put your name down there," shoving the book and pencil forward.

With the motion, the lad's face, as he looked up, was fully exposed to the glare from the hall lamp.

Simons started. Something he saw there—some wonderful resemblance—struck him forcibly.

Having obtained his receipt for the delivery of the dispatch, the little fellow was off. He was a quick one at transacting business.

Hardly had Simons closed the door and turned to reascend the stairs, when he paused short with another start. His wondrous faculty of memory had relieved a sudden perplexity in his mind.

"By gracious!" he exclaimed. "That lad's face was the living image, in miniature, of John Allsworth's!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CORALIE, THE "TREASURY GIRL."

At the hour of four o'clock P. M., on the afternoon of the same day marked by the incidents of the foregoing chapters, the Government Departments were closing and the streets were thronged with hundreds of clerks hastening homeward.

Emerging from the lower Fifteenth street entrance of the Treasury building, having come from her warlike post in the Redemption Division, was a young girl plainly but neatly clad and wearing the almost invariable thick veil characteristic of her class.

She hurried along "F" street, eastward, alone. At the corner of Fourteenth she was met by a gentleman dressed fashionably and of not unhandsome appearance.

Evidently he had anticipated her coming; they were acquainted, for she extended a dainty gloved hand to him in greeting.

"So you are determined to catch me, as usual!" she exclaimed, pleasantly.

"Of course, Coralie. Won't you put up your veil?"

"And what if Mr. Lyn Cornish's aristocratic friends should see him walking with a 'Treasury girl'? You won't be warned."

"Mr. Lyn Cornish's friends may go to the—Jericho!" he declared, impatiently. "If a man hasn't the right to walk the streets with the woman he loves, things have come to a pretty pass."

"Hush, Lyn! I have begged of you not to speak of love to me."

"A request of most unreasonable character."

"I must insist—and it is not the first time—that you abide by it."

"It is no use. I love, I always shall love you—"

"Hush—hush!"

"And I am resolved to fight down the mysterious barrier which you say exists, induce you to leave this drudgery life and, as my wife, occupy the sphere for which you are undoubtedly intended. Your persistency in working as you do, your trying to put me off is extraordinary, because you will not even explain it. I know you love me, Coralie. You cannot conceal it."

She had drawn aside her veil. Her face, withal the paleness wrought there by the fetid airs of her confined labor, was of striking beauty, with hazel eyes and long, drooping lashes. At his speech the pale cheeks colored; there could be no doubt that she reciprocated the young man's passion.

But there was not, nor ever had been, any open acknowledged preference for him. To the contrary, planted firmly in opposition to his ardent profession was a barrier, the precise

nature of which she mystified him by refusing to reveal, while it ached gallingly in her own soul.

"You are mistaken in your hopes, Lyn," she said, with a serious tremulousness. "I adhere—and must continue to adhere—to the life I have laid out for myself—"

"Nonsense! But it is uncalled for."

"—Because I do not wish to be idle," she completed. "If I do love you at all, it is as a very dear friend. Believe me, it can never amount to any more than that. I would not willingly wound you, but you must give up your love for me."

"That I will never do."

"We can never marry. It is utterly impossible."

"Oh, we shall see," rejoined the persistent lover, smilingly.

At the end of two squares' walk, he paused and bowed to leave her.

"I intend calling upon you this evening, Coralie."

"You will be welcome, Lyn. But remember—"

"No love-making, eh?" he laughed, lightly.

She entered the boarding-house at the corner. It was not her home. The plan of renting rooms and "boarding out" is an almost general mode of life with Government employees at Washington, ladies and gentlemen, married and single.

When Coralie had finished her late afternoon dinner, she sought her rooms on North Eleventh street—a cosey parlor and bedchamber, both furnished with a luxuriousness remarkable for the means of a "Treasury girl" on an income of \$600 per annum.

Coralie, however, had other resources than her salary merely.

Her lover, Lyn Cornish, was, to the observant eye, a young man of considerable worldly experience; perhaps there was even a "fast" stamp in his features. But whatever might have been his inner traits, he meant, at this time, an honorable love toward Coralie Damer, and had urged his suit ever since the day, one month previous, when he had saved her from being crushed to death by a runaway team on Pennsylvania avenue, an event that was the inauguration of their acquaintance.

Coralie realized that to him she owed her life. She was inexpressibly grateful. More, as weeks passed, and she listened to his ardent protestations, there had crept into her heart an influence stronger than the regard of friendship.

This did not bring the conscious blush of bliss, the thrill of buoyancy to the veins, as is the case where Cupid reigns; instead, there seemed to draw a troubous shadow about her, distilling a bitter draught in every hour of her life, and totally inexplicable to Cornish.

More than once, in the solitude of her apartments, she had bowed her dark-haired head to her hands, murmuring:

"I love him! I love him, and he knows it! But I can never be his—never. Heaven has seen fit to sow a blight in my life. Oh God! guide me to be firm and do right. It is hard, hard that I should be shackled thus. If Lyn persists, there is no other way than that we must part forever. I cannot bear this hard trial."

Then her cheeks would redden and she would suddenly cry:

"What would Madeline say if she knew I dared to care for this man? I could not hide it from her—she who can read faces so easily. No, I have no right to even see Lyn, so fully aware as I am how—how—we love each other, and the very sin of it."

But day followed day the same. Lyn Cornish's visits continued regularly. She could not find the courage to ordain the parting.

That evening, seated before the glowing mica panes of the stove in her cosey parlor—gazing thoughtfully, vaguely, at the ruddy glare—she awaited his coming.

Yet it was not Lyn Cornish who, after a ring at the door-bell, was ushered into her presence, but a portly individual with watery eyes, part-bald pate, bristling gray mustache, and a most disagreeable grin on his face. In one hand he carried an ebon-polished cane, in the other hand a glossy silk hat, and hat and cane were stretched behind him, with a swing, as he made an awkwardly gallant bow, as he spoke in a deep, scraping voice:

"Aw—hem! good-evening, Miss Coralie."

"It is you, Mr. Bilspoon! Good-evening. This is an unexpected pleasure."

"Hope I do not intrude."

"Not in the least. I am pleased to see you. Have a seat."

"Thanks. I have not ventured to call—aw—for some time."

"And much to my surprise, Mr. Bilspoon. I have been wishing for an opportunity to thank you for the interest you took, and the influence you commanded, in securing my appointment at the Treasury."

"Aw—yes," with a pompous inflexion and gesture. "That was all very easy—easy for me, you know."

"It seems so, by the quickness of my getting

the appointment. I am very grateful, indeed. I shall always bear your friendliness in remembrance, Mr. Bilspoon."

"Aw—hm! yes, yes. Senator Slapp, whom I induced to give personal attention to your application, is an intimate friend of mine, you know. He would do 'most anything I asked. Ha, ha! he is not likely to forget Thomas Bilspoon, who spent so much money on his election—oh, no! I assure you. Aw—he is working hard for a favorable report on my back claim of the pork contract—some \$100,000. Slapp is chairman of the claims committee, you know."

"I am greatly indebted to him, also," said Coralie, while the portly Bilspoon swayed backward and forward toward her in his seat, as if to emphasize his avowed intimacy with so important a personage as the chairman of the claims committee.

"How do you like your position in the Treasury, Miss Coralie?"

"Oh, I have had a fair opportunity to judge, I think, having been there for two months, and my impression is that I shall like it very much."

"I am glad to hear it. And now, my dear, I have called to talk a little business with you."

"Business?" she repeated, in surprise.

"Yes," hitching his chair closer.

He paused, fingering his neck-tie, pulling his collar at the front, as if throat and body were swelling with an extraordinary importance of a certain matter he was on the point of broaching.

Coralie could not imagine what possible "business" Thomas Bilspoon could have to transact with her. She gazed, quietly waiting.

CHAPTER IX.

A FLAT REJECTION.

WHEN Madeline Damer and her sister, Coralie, arrived in Washington City, some months previous, they had taken a room at the National Hotel, intending to remain there until they could secure more quiet, private and, at the same time, comfortable quarters.

The hotel had just emerged from a grand overhauling and many improvements throughout its interior, and as the season opened with even an unusual promise of prosperity, the proprietors announced the compliment of a select host to be extended to their guests.

It was on the brilliant occasion of this hop that the Damer sisters, by formal introduction, became acquainted with the wealthy and pompous widower, Thomas Bilspoon.

He had been a successful pork-packer of Cincinnati during past years; had filled heavy contracts with the Government; was then in Washington looking after a considerable sum claimed as back dues.

Coralie made no concealment of her intention to apply for a government appointment, and Bilspoon had immediately shown himself interested in her to a remarkable degree, with profuse declarations that he could materially, and would be proud to, assist her.

In this he did not boast idly, for the young girl found herself, after a surprisingly short interval, duly installed in the Redemption Division, at the Treasury.

But Coralie had yet to learn that in the gay capital favors were few, and those who exercised them, fewer, without the after-clap of recompense for such exertions and influence.

The moment her induction into office was a fixed fact, the wily Bilspoon tickled himself with the conceit that he had a decided claim upon the little hazel-eyed beauty, who, unknown to herself, had excited his admiration from the first hour of their meeting.

"My dear Miss Coralie," he proceeded, in a manner meant to be highly dignified and persuasive, "before I begin what I wish to say, let me premise: I am rich—very rich, indeed. I am, as you are aware, a widower. I have no children. For a number of years I have had no settled home. I am not an old man, by any means—aw-hm!—but old enough, quite, to make it desirable that I should stop this gadabout—have an anchorage, you know. You comprehend, Miss Coralie? I ought to marry again."

A light began to dawn upon her. This fat, bald-browed, bristling-lipped, watery-eyed man of wealth—who seemed to have acquired a certain personal affinity of appearance with his swinish business—had conceived a love for her; his glances, his confidential assumption, plainly indicated the fact.

There was a vein of humor in Coralie's composition, and as the positively ridiculous phase of the situation became apparent, she could scarcely repress an amused smile.

"Now, Miss Coralie, in my position, my consequent mingling in the best society, you know, I—aw-hm!—I have come across very many pretty, fascinating ladies."

"I suppose so."

"Yes. But I confess I have seen none to so deeply excite my regard as your c-h-a-r-m-i-n-g self."

"Indeed!"

"It is a fact. I hope you understand me. I am not gifted with any rare love-making pow-

ers; my first wife— But never mind about my first wife. I admire you greatly. I—aw-hm! —will you honor me by becoming Mrs. Thomas Bilspoon?"

"Why, this is very unexpected!" she exclaimed.

"I can provide for you bounteously, you know—I am so very rich. Anything your heart may desire, my money will procure—"

"Stop, please, Mr. Bilspoon."

"You accept?"

"Oh, no. I must decline your offer."

He straightened up and looked at her in astonishment.

"What! You cannot mean it?"

"But I do."

"You don't know what you are saying!"

"I think I did not misunderstand my own words."

"You—you—refuse to marry me!" he nearly gasped, incredulously.

"Is it not best to be plain in saying so?"

His face reddened and his cheeks puffed.

"But think of what you are throwing away! Wealth, luxury, ease—"

"I could not be your wife, Mr. Bilspoon, even granting the utterly impossible supposition that I cared for you from an affectionate stand-point. I must be plain; I could not if I would."

"Why not?"

"For reasons that I do not feel called upon to disclose."

He started to his feet with an angry gesture. She arose, also.

"Are you aware of who I am?" he fumed, with frowning asperity. "Do you weigh the fact of what you owe to me? But for me, you would be—like hundreds of others of your sex in Washington this minute—waiting vainly, hopelessly, for your appointment—"

She interrupted him with a raised hand and sparkling eyes:

"If it was solely with this in contemplation—and not through an actual disinterested friendship—that you labored to hasten my appointment, Mr. Bilspoon, let me inform you that, fortunately, I am not dependent upon the United States Government, nor anybody else, for my support; and I can easily cancel my obligations to you by resigning."

"And if you don't get out of here, I'll pitch you out!" cried a voice from the doorway.

Lyn Cornish entered. He surveyed the portly suitor sternly.

Bilspoon glanced from one to the other, then, with an underbreath oath, retreated precipitately from the house.

"Who is that old rascal?" Lyn asked Coralie, when they were alone.

He soon knew all that she could tell concerning Thomas Bilspoon, his business in Washington, his exertions in hastening the young girl into her position at the Treasury—these inspired by the motive just revealed.

"Well, I think I can soon get rid of him."

"No violence, Lyn, please."

"Oh, no. Ten to one I can get him worked into such a condition of disgust within a fortnight that he will run away from the town."

"What will you do?"

"You must not be too inquisitive. This is a queer capital, and it is a hive of political wire-shops."

"Wire-shops?" she repeated, in a puzzled way.

He laughed.

"Remember, Lyn, after all, he has great influence with Senator Slapp."

"Bother old Slapp! I mean to play a little game on that claim of Thomas Bilspoon, Esq., which you say is being considered by the committee."

Meantime Bilspoon was striding furiously away. He clinched and shook his fat fists aloft, gnashing and growling:

"The little, devil-tempered chit! She refuses, scorns me and my offer! She pays scant gratefulness for my favors. I see. That young scamp who came in is her lover—that's it. But he won't get her. No. I'll have you by fair means or foul, Coralie Damer, mind that— Out of my way, you vagabond!" he snapped, aiming a kick at a yelling newsboy who approached him at the corner.

"I'll let no grass grow under my feet, now, since my plot to get the girl by fair means has failed," he mumbled and ground under his bristly mustache. "I'll make her mine, one way or another, if it costs a small mint of money. She's independent of the United States and everybody else, eh? I'll show her about that—show her what money can do. Aha! money's the thing. And that scamp lover of hers—I'll get somebody to stick his neck for him like a hog in a factory, by blazes!"

He did not underestimate the convenience of wealth, in the City of Washington especially; it is next to impossible to imagine what money will not accomplish there.

Continuing rapidly onward, he crossed Pennsylvania avenue, thence to the right along "D" street, presently turning to the left.

He was then in the locality known during war times as "The Division"—then notorious for innumerable man-traps and excessive pha-

ses of wickedness, though of later years rigorously purified.

A short walk ahead there was a dingy-fronted saloon burning a flickering beacon over the entrance. Into this establishment Bilspoon disappeared with a directness of movement indicating entire familiarity with his surroundings.

A motley crowd was assembled and jabbering in the bar-room, who looked curiously at the elegantly-dressed and pompous personage that appeared so abruptly within the smoky, liquor-fuming haunt.

Bilspoon proceeded straight to the end of the counter and passed through a narrow, grimy door there leading to a private apartment. As he went, he paused to say in an undertone to the landlord who was behind the counter:

"Let your man take charge, Buck. Bring a bottle of brandy into the back room. Bring it yourself. I want to talk some business with you."

"All right. Comin' in a minute."

Flopping into a chair in the sanded side room, and thumping his cane on the floor, Thomas Bilspoon awaited the coming of the landlord and the brandy impatiently.

CHAPTER X.

AN EVIL PLOT.

THE cellar of the saloon entered by the ex-pork-packer contained a mystery in the shape of a boarded circle about six feet in diameter, its sides of neat tongue-and-groove about five feet high with balustrade capping.

A great pile of cages of various sizes and patterns, from which emanated a highly disagreeable and recognizable odor, betrayed to the "posted" observer that this surrounding was the precinct of a "rat pit."

Thomas Bilspoon was an admirer of plucky terriers; he had both won and lost money at this same pit, where he had first, and o'er frequently since, met with Buck Gosh.

In his angry mood with Coralie on this night, and resolving upon a dark scheme to forcibly possess himself of the girl, he at once made the move to see what money would do with the hardened individual who presided over the rat-pit exhibitions.

Buck Gosh was a sturdy statured man with a button-ball head, smooth, shiny, bulldog face, who always wore his shirt-sleeves rolled up to display the knotty-muscled arms of which he was brutally proud.

"You want to talk some business? What about?" he asked, entering with the ordered brandy bottle, water-pitcher and tumblers.

Bilspoon helped himself copiously to the liquor, smacking his lips after the draught in a way that proved it was one of several "private" bottles Buck Gosh kept on hand for some of his sporting customers.

"Yes, my dear Buck. Aw-hm! I have something I want you to do for me."

"What is it? What'll it pay?"

Buck was decidedly of the class who put a money value on everything.

"Wait a moment. Do not push too fast. In the first place I would remark that I am in love—head over heels."

"A' old codg. like you! Haw-haw!" he exclaimed, with a grunting laugh.

"Not so old as you imagine, sir," brusquely. "In the second place, the girl does not care a finger-snap, and a bonnet to boot, for me."

"Don't blame 'er much," commented the ruffian, inwardly, but saying nothing.

"Now, Buck—aw-hm!—I am going to have that girl, *nolens volens*."

"That's talk, nollins wollins—whatever 'n thunder you mean—durned if I know. Well, an' what 'v' I got to do 'ith it?"

"That is just the point."

"Oh, 'tis, eh?"

"Yes. I want you to kidnap the girl."

"Kidnap 'er! An' do what with her?" in huge surprise.

"I guess you won't be dumb on that question, when I tell you that I will pay \$1,000 to get possession of her," and Bilspoon, feeling conscious that he had named a reasonable bait, leaned backward complacently in his chair.

Buck Gosh regarded him steadily and with glistening orbs. It was not reasonable to imagine that the wealthy Thomas Bilspoon was making a "plant" to eventually break up his business and get him in limbo. Their acquaintance had always been friendly.

"Is this 'ere square?"

"Square all the time."

"An' s'pose I earn the cash—then what?"

"Then I have another thousand to put up."

"For what?"

"A place to keep her safe, under guard, where nobody can gain entrance to her besides myself, until I have compelled her to marry me."

The fellow scratched his close-cropped head meditatively.

"Look here, this's a ticklish thing. S'pose we're caught at it?"

"Suppose that you are not."

"I know. But I'm weighin' the chances."

"Pile the \$2,000 on the other side of the scale."

"Oh, it's some money, sure." Then another,

a sly thought came into his busy brain. "Say, what if I was to give the thing away to the gal, an' she was willin' to pay more, an' the papers hauled you over—"

Bilspoon stopped his speech, grinning.

"Too fast—too fast, my dear Buck. Aw-hm! You do not even know who the girl is yet. I am willing to swear she isn't able to buy you off, for she works pretty hard for her living. As to the 'giving away' business—what about this, eh?"

Bilspoon pointed a finger, in a rising and falling manner, indicating the cellar beneath them. The bloated features of Buck Gosh paled slightly. He was conducting a profitable liquor trade there; it would be a bad stroke of luck for the authorities to "clean him out," as they assuredly would have done upon being apprised of the brutish and filthy exhibitions carried on in the cellar. But it was something more than this reflection that brought the startled sign to his face; he had another, a constantly preying cause to dread an investigation of his underground premises, which will present itself to the reader ere long.

"You ain't green, anyhow," Buck admitted.

"Aw-hm! well, no. But what is it? What do you say? Come."

"I guess we can trade."

"It is a bargain?"

"Yes."

They shook hands across the pine board table, in a sort of thieves' compact style.

"Have you a room, a good strong room to confine her in?"

"Oh, I can easy fix that."

"Very well."

Bilspoon produced a plethoric wallet. He knew too much of the world to think that there would be any work done, in a case of this dangerous character, until some money showed itself. Counting out \$500, he handed it over with a shove.

"There is a part payment. When the pretty minx is housed, I will give you five hundred more. When I have conquered the girl I will give you the other thousand."

"But s'pose she doesn't 'conquer' for a cent?"

"No fear. Leave that to me. But I will agree to this: you shall have the balance in two weeks' time, anyhow."

"That's square 'nough."

"Now then, Buck, pencil and paper. I have made a complete study of the house where she lives, in prospect of just such an occurrence as this. I will now make a diagram showing all accesses—ways to get in, you know."

"Yes, use plain talk."

"Her rooms are on the first floor—one front, one back; all windows are long, reaching nearly to the floor, the sills only about chin-high from the ground, short iron railings on the outside. The house is No. — North Eleventh street, near the corner. Her name is Coralie Damer. Around the corner is an alley leading to the yard gate of the premises. She lives entirely alone; both the landlady and servant-girl have their sleeping-rooms in the top story, so you see there is hardly any obstacle. There you are. The other minutiae you can cogitate over yourself."

The scheming Thomas Bilspoon carefully prepared his impromptu diagram, talking thus the while. In less than twenty minutes villainous Buck Gosh was in possession of all the information he needed.

"When's this 'ere thing to be did?"

"Right away. To-night."

"Why—thunder!—hadn't I better spy round a bit an' get all the bearin's down fine?"

"I say it must be accomplished to-night. I have no time to fool away over her. I want her; I am going to have her, and the sooner the better."

"Well, you're boss."

"To-night is as good as any other night," declared Bilspoon, taking a second large drink of brandy and arising.

"Oh, I s'pose so. When'll I see you again?"

"To-morrow night. And I shall expect to find the girl caged. Good-night."

"So-long."

He left the room and the saloon walking rapidly to get clear of the locality.

Terrible and near was the coil of the shadow over pure and pretty Coralie.

As Buck Gosh returned to the bar-room a moment behind Bilspoon, he saw two ugly-looking roughs making toward the front door with stealthy haste.

"Here—none o' that!" he cried, with an oath.

The evilly-intent pair halted immediately, slinking back.

"No funny game on that gent who's just gone out o' here. He's a partic'lar friend o' mine, an' don't you forget it."

With a menacing nod toward them, he passed behind his counter.

CHAPTER XI.

A COUNTERFEITER'S DEN.

BUCK then addressed his assistant in an undertone:

"Seen anything o' Daisy to-night?"

"No; she ain't been around."

"Slip down an' see if she's to home, an' tell 'er I want 'er right sharp."

The man departed. After a brief interval he returned, and in reply to Buck's look of inquiry jerked his head in a meaning nod toward a back door leading to the yard.

Buck immediately went to the exit. As he opened the door—pulling it carefully shut behind him—the dull light from the bar-room lamps glanced athwart a female form dressed in garish fineries, and showed a rouged face with artificially bright eyes.

"I say, Daisy, is that you?" he said, guardedly, in the gloom.

"Yes, I'm on hand. What's up?"

"Do you want to make a cool couple o' hundred?"

"Show me how, that's all. What's the color of it?"

"Square cash."

"Now you're talkin'. Well, what's to be done for it?"

"It's a mighty scary secret."

"Did I ever give anything away?"

"A miss-go means jail, sure pop."

"I guess I ain't afraid, if you ain't. Come, what's the racket?"

"I can trust you?"

"Honor bright."

"Let's go inside. There might be some curious cuss a-hoofin' 'round here too clost in this dark."

The woman called Daisy boldly followed him through the bar-room, into the sanded side apartment, heedless of the staring crowd.

"What a nasty gang that is out there, Buck. Why don't you get rid of them—you've got plenty of money—and set up in good style on the Avenue?"

"Oh, they drop a dollar onc't in awhile."

"Mark my word for it, you'll wish you'd listened to me long ago and cleared out of this ranch, and cut away from all that's in it—now."

The words were prophetic. Buck Gosh was to vividly recall this speech of Daisy's at a later day.

"That's neither here nor there," he rejoined. "You sit down while I explain this business on hand. It's a queer game, but it's payin' big."

"Go ahead. I'm listening."

The pair entered into a low-toned dialogue, in which the name of Coralie Damer was dropped more than once.

It was nearly ten o'clock when she arose to depart, saying:

"All correct, Buck, it's plain enough for a blind mule. I'll go home and fix the room. I've got just the very thing. And as luck just happens, there's nobody living in the old house but me, now. I'll be on the lookout for you. But remember what I said, if there's any *blood* in this lay-out of the old gent's, I'll up and blow everything—now."

"Don't let that worry you. I'm not a-dabblin' in that kind o' stock, either."

When assured that she was gone, Buck Gosh stepped forward and turned the key in the door-lock. Then he crossed to one side of the wall—a wall dadoed in low, *bona fide* panels.

Pressing a spring, one of these panels moved slowly aside. He entered the aperture, drawing the panel shut after him, and slowly descended a flight of joist-timber stairs scarcely two feet in breadth between the walls.

Down, down, he felt his way, presently bringing up against a stout obstruction, on which he delivered several peculiar kicks. This was a door, for it opened at his signal, admitting him into an underground chamber evidently deeper, if not directly under the cellar where the rat-pit exhibitions were held, and the roof strongly supported by jointed beams and beveled pillars of wood.

Four men in their shirt-sleeves were the e, busily at work among a lot of mysterious tools and plates and crisp paper, one brawny, whiskered, villainous-visaged fellow working the ponderous lever of a hand-press, while another, at a far corner, was seated at a desk, writing under the brilliant rays of a student lamp.

The sleeves of this latter person were also rolled up nearly to the shoulder, and on one of the bare arms, ad mirably executed in India ink, was the device of a blue anchor. The significance of this item will be apparent in a future chapter.

Buck motioned to the man at the lever to step aside, when a whispered conversation ensued.

In a few seconds they advanced to the corner where the young man was writing.

Looking over his shoulder with them, we see stacked before him packages of twenty-dollar legal-tender notes. One of these notes was at the instant under his pen; a perfect signature had just been attached, the ink being not yet dry, while several notes—on which he had not deemed the signatures sufficiently exact—lay torn and scattered on the earthen floor around him.

Plainly, this subterraneous chamber was a counterfeiters' den. Judging by the samples here displayed, it was no wonder—as the famous Colonel Wood once said—that the Treasury officials themselves redeemed many thousands of spurious money.

These were, indeed, a bold gang—conducting operations directly at the seat of Government, and under the very noses, as it were, of the shrewd Department agents.

"Mr. Bob," said Buck, "I want you to do some scribblin' for me outside o' them 'ere note beauties."

"What is it, Buck?"

"Got some common paper there?"

"Yes," slipping forward a small sheet and waiting, pen in hand.

"Make it nobby and delicate like—a full-blood young gal's fist."

Buck Gosh then dictated, from which the following was the result:

"Sudden and imperative business has called me from town at a late hour this evening. May return shortly. Have no uneasiness regarding my absence."

"How's that?"

"First class. On'y it needs the name, now. Give 'er a gal's flourish."

"What is the name?"

"Coralie Damer."

"Coralie Damer!" echoed Mr. Bob, huskily. He turned suddenly very pale, and gazed into Buck's face with a strange, intense expression.

"Yes, that's the name. Put 'er down."

"What is afoot concerning the young lady?"

"I don't know as it's any o' your par-tic'lar business, Mr. Bob. It's private, that's all. You just put down the name, I say, an' oblige a frien'. That'll be all right. Why, you ain't acquainted with 'er, are you?"

Mr. Bob recovered himself, saying, nervously smiling as he attached the name which had caused him a start:

"Oh, no—not at all, only the name sounded a little familiar."

As Buck and the giant ruffian withdrew from the den, Mr. Bob gazed, with a dazed frown, after them.

"Coralie Damer!" he uttered, to himself, in low, thoughtful exclamation. "It must be the same. She is living in Washington, then. There is some plot about to be sprung on her—else what means that forgery? Bah! what have I to do with Coralie Damer at this late day?"

He resumed his criminal work at the desk. But note after note was spoiled; his hand shook under an excitement he could not master, aroused by mention of that name.

"I'll have to quit, boys," he said, at last. "My hand has a bad quirk i' the wrist to-night," and Mr. Bob ascended by the secret stairway to seek a stimulant and a breath of fresh air.

Shortly before midnight a close hack went leisurely northward along Eleventh street, its pace not in the least calculated to excite suspicion.

Presently turning a corner it paused—for an instant only—before an alley.

Two figures alighted, gliding quickly into the alley, and so noiseless was their movement that they must have had muffled feet. The hack started on again.

The vicinity seemed to be totally deserted; no patrolling policeman nor belated "wanderer of the night" was near.

But no sooner had the hack driven off than a small form emerged to view, from the deep shadow close against the plank wall, and ran on tip-toe to the alley, peering cautiously around the corner there.

"That ain't any drunken 'bloods' slipping in the back way!" exclaimed a boyish voice, hushedly. "Looks more like burglars; and they must have gum shoes on, I reckon, they move so soft."

The moonlight revealed the tiny, uniformed A. D. Telegraph messenger lad, who was then returning after having delivered the dispatch to John Smedley, Esq., at Daymon's residence.

Curious and bold, he watched the two men proceeding up the alley.

They paused at a gate, and, in a few seconds, had disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

BILSPOON.

LYN CORNISH remained until after ten o'clock that evening, in the society of the young girl he loved, yet who forbade his passion in a way both earnest and enigmatical.

Though in courtesy to her request he refrained from any allusion to his affection, his whole manner was that of one who confidently hoped to either win her eventually or obtain—as he deemed his right—some satisfactory explanation of her quiet but emphatic declarations that there existed an insurmountable obstacle to their union, and therefore all thoughts of love were little less than madness.

She loved no other man. This much of a confession he had won from her.

When he took his departure he was permitted to hold and press Coralie's dainty hand in his own, and his face was bright with a lover's cheeriness.

Coralie was half-glad, half-sorry, when his visit was over. There was sincere pleasure and entertainment in his company for her; this

manifold in her tender feelings toward him. And because, too, of this very existence of heart-sentiment, every minute she sat and talked with him, under forced restraint, was an ordeal in which her pent-up soul was crying:

"I love him! I love him, and he knows it! But it is a sin. I have no right. Be still, oh, my heart!"

Cornish wended his way homeward. As if to defy the perplexity occasioned by Coralie's singular behavior, he whistled lowly a gay little tune that seemed to say:

"I love my love—my love loves me!"

On Massachusetts avenue, in the square below the magnificent mansion of John Allsworth, was situated the Cornish residence.

Araminta Cornish was a reputed widow of wealth. Her immediate family consisted only of her son, Lyn, and an omnipresent Monsieur Dider, a highly educated and talented secretary of madame's business affairs.

Wide and favorable had been the gossip over the widow's brilliant reception at the opening of the season. Her standing was at once fixed in the circles of social fashion, when senators, representatives, army and navy greater lights, with their families, figured on her acquaintance list; and prominent among these was the Honorable Slapp, United States Senator from —.

Letting himself in with a latch-key, Lyn ascended to a cosey library devoted exclusively to his own use.

Touching a bell, he inquired of the servant who answered it:

"Has Mrs. Cornish retired?"

"I don't know. I can see, sir."

"Do so. And if she has not, say that I urgently desire a private conversation with her here in my library."

Mrs. Araminta was not long in answering the request.

She was a woman of fully two hundred pounds avoirdupois, perhaps fifty-five years of age. Her suit was of richest material, cut low in the neck, partly revealing a massive bust under an exquisite illusion of lace; and lace armlets, from the high-cut sleeves to the wrist, exposed large, rounded arms of white and dimples. Heavy gold bracelets shone beneath the lace; her large but finely-tapering fingers were adorned by costly rings. Her mien was one of profound dignity, combined with a power to be delightfully attractive.

But there was no drawing-room formality about her greeting to Lyn. She advanced and embraced him, smiling radiantly.

"My dear boy, you have absented yourself so strangely from me of late. Where do you spend your evenings?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular, mother."

"Ah! that is the most dangerous of all ways."

"Well, I am not in any very wicked mischief, depend."

"It is a relief to have that assurance."

"But I have a favor to ask of you, mother mine."

"You know I would do anything in my power for you, Lyn."

"Please be seated. Now, if there was a man in Washington whom I wished to drive out of it, and you could assist me, would you do so?"

"Assuredly, yes," assented Mrs. Cornish, grave with an apprehension that Lyn had gotten himself into some scrape.

"Well, there is just such a man."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Thomas Bilspoon."

"I never heard of him."

"Presumably not. He is an ex-pork-packer of Cincinnati, and wealthy."

"What horribly greasy money it must be!" she exclaimed.

"I consider him my foe. I have a jolly plot to work him out of my way."

"Plot! Plots are dangerous things," declared Mrs. Cornish, not understanding the mischievous twinkle in his eyes. Then: "Oh, Lyn! my boy, tell me what is the matter? What have you been doing? What is there about this man?"

She changed her seat to one beside him and laid one hand upon his arm.

"There's nothing even serious in the whole affair—not so much as a quarrel. Just listen a minute. Thomas Bilspoon has a bill before the claims committee—something like \$100,000. Slapp, you know, is chairman of that committee."

"Yes, I believe he is."

"I think it would not require much effort for any woman of wit to twirl the aforesaid Slapp around her finger—so," and Lyn wriggled two of his fingers around together, demonstratively.

"What upon this earth are you coming at?" asked Mrs. Cornish, bewildered.

"Only this; I want you to interview old Slapp. Hand to him a note, which I shall prepare. Tell him you are extremely interested in the contents of the note, though you cannot give reasons at the precise moment. Be mysterious—see? Impress him, captivate him—you can do so easily enough, mother mine, considering, too, the quite friendly acquaintance between you. The result will be; this same

Thomas Bilspoon will be so heavily bled through his purse-strings—”

“Lyn!” she broke in, as if her breath was taken away.

“The claim will be either blocked over indefinitely, or made so expensive to him that, if I judge my man aright, he will quit Washington in disgust.”

“This is too much!” Mrs. Cornish managed to say, in her amazement.

“Oh, no, it isn’t.”

“I—a lobbyist! What in the world are you thinking about?”

“It cannot be called that; it is only for this one special instance. You must accomplish what I ask, mother mine, or—” dissembling the frowning expression of one confronted by a terrible alternative—“or there will be bloodshed. He must be made to clear out. You said you would do anything in your power for me.”

“Yes, but—”

“But listen to me,” and Lyn entered into an elaborate argument, knowing that it would be irresistible with the mother who idolized and would have made any sacrifice to his interests.

In a very short while his persuasion won her consent to do as he wished; yes, she would exert herself to the utmost in the part she was to play in the scheme of wire-pulling against the ex-pork-packer.

When mother and son parted she had tucked in her bosom a business-looking missive for delivery to the Honorable — Slapp.

Thomas Bilspoon was soon to learn how some things are sometimes manipulated at the tricky capital.

As Mrs. Cornish passed along the entryway toward her own apartments she encountered a tall, gentlemanly-looking personage attired in glossy black, with black, piercing eyes and an immense black mustache that was waxed and curled up to the sides of his nose.

It was Mrs. Cornish’s secretary.

His face, of sallow complexion, was working as if in perturbation as he paused to salute politely.

“Ah! Monsieur Derdier,” she addressed him, familiarly.

“Madame.”

“I shall want to talk with you upon some money matters in the morning.”

“I shall be at madame’s service,” bowing low, with one hand on his breast.

“What is the cause of your excitement Monsieur Derdier?” for she perceived that he was laboring under an effort at calmness.

“Eet is not’ing—truly, madame. I come just from ze brisk walk on ze street. I have—what you say!—ze stimulate pulse.”

But when she had passed on, and he resumed a rapid ascent of the stairway, he was muttering mysteriously, with clinched fists and gleaming eyes:

“Ze rascal! Ze infamous! I s’all near kill him! He run away from me, eh? He hide from me, eh? Now zen I s’all vwp, I s’all a’most beat him to deat! Ha! you rogue, Lepo! I teach you I am ze master!”

Monsieur Derdier proceeded to the top story, thence to a room in the extreme back building—rather a closet, for there was no window to it; a transom over the door afforded scant ventilation and light.

The transom he closed, then unlocked the door and entered, drawing from beneath his vest a whip with a very short handle and very long, serpentine lash.

Presently there arose within the room a succession of most outlandish howlings—excruciating, half smothered within the confined space.

Mrs. Cornish in her bedroom about to disrobe, paused, listening in surprise and alarm. Lyn Cornish, still in the library, started to his feet, as the mysterious cries faintly penetrated there.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BLOODY IMPRINT.

HAVING secured an assistant in the person of Madeline Damer, Jack Simons, in his disguise as John Smedley, returned to Henry Daymon’s rooms and relieved the landlady, who had expressed much solicitude for her prompt-paying lodger, and who had willingly consented to remain near the young man until a more proper attendant arrived.

“My name is Smedley,” he said, introducing himself to the wounded man, who had been made as comfortable as possible in bed.

“Pleased to see you, Mr. Smedley.”

“I am from the detective agency of Lyon & Gatch.”

“I expected you, sir—or some one of your profession.”

“Your friend, Mr. Jerry Smyrck, sent me.”

“It is very kind in Mr. Smyrck. Draw a chair, please.”

“You have met with a loss?” said the detective, interrogatively.

“Yes. But before I mention what it was, and certain other matters in connection with it, I must have your promise that you will not make any divulgences to others, relative to it, until we have made a recovery—to say nothing of tracking down the villain who attempted my life.”

“Oh, certainly; I promise you that.”

“The item lost was a bracelet.”

“Ah!”

“Yes. It did not belong to me, but to a young lady who is my promised wife. Through a most singular circumstance it came into my possession. I believe I saved Miss Allsworth—”

“Oh, the young lady’s name is Allsworth?” with affected innocence. “I know where she lives—at least, a family of that name—on Massachusetts avenue. They are reputed very wealthy.”

“You know the premises, then. I am glad of it, for you will better understand the little detail I mean to give as to how I got the bracelet. I believe that, by the merest accident, I prevented a rather bold robbery there. But now, what I so opportunely saved is lost to me. I am very much astounded by certain behavior of Miss Allsworth, to-day and this evening. I wish, also, to employ you to find out—if it can be done by strictly honorable means—what the matter is with her, that she should write such a note as this to me, her affianced husband,” drawing from beneath his pillow the note that had been left on his center-table by the so-called “uncle from Baltimore,” and adding:

“I am completely mystified, I declare! And the loss of the bracelet—which I had intended returning to her this evening—and this painful wound from the assassin, who robbed me, all combine, as you may well imagine, to render my inactivity at such a time tremendously aggravating.”

“Yes—of course—no doubt.”

The disguised detective was, to all appearances, engrossed with studying the brief epistle which had been handed to him. But, in truth, he was in a state of perplexity, thinking deeply.

Henry Daymon had not only candidly acknowledged that he had Cecilia’s bracelet, but was about to explain how he came to have it. Here was a puzzler.

“But about this bracelet, first,” he said, looking up and regarding the young man steadily. “Describe it to me. Tell me what you can about the thief.”

Before any further remark could be made there was a knock at the door, which Smedley arose and answered.

“Oh, you are the gentleman with Mr. Daymon. Is your name Smedley, sir?” inquired the servant-girl.

“Yes, that is my name.”

“Well, there’s a telegraph boy down at the front steps says he wants to see you in a mighty big hurry. He’s an impudent chit, if ever was, with which after comment on the diminutive and quick-tongued caller, she withdrew.

“Some one to see me below, Mr. Daymon. You will excuse me for a few minutes?”

“Certainly.”

Smedley descended as shown, returning somewhat hastily to the bedroom.

“I shall have to ask that you let this case of yours rest until morning, Mr. Daymon. I am sure that not much will be lost by so short a delay. Something has occurred to call me away from you instantly—something pressing and imperative. I will request the landlady to remain up and within call, and—see: I will attach this string to the bell-rope, so that if you need any one, you can ring.”

“I am sorry you have to go. Be sure and come early. But Mr. Smyrck said he would have an attendant here to-night for me.”

“I am well acquainted with the gentleman. Whatever he has promised to do, you may depend upon it. Good-night.”

Jack Simons sped away to the Allsworth mansion, removing his disguise as he went. The hall-servant was on the lookout for him, admitting him almost before his hand left the bell-knob.

Allsworth had ordered the servants away from his daughter’s apartment. There was no one present besides Finfin and himself when the detective was shown up there.

Cecilia had not yet recovered from her death-like swoon. Finfin was tenderly bathing the pallid temples, anon holding a vinaigrette to the lifeless nostrils.

“You are in trouble again, Mr. Allsworth?”

There was a ring at the front bell as he spoke; some one entered, ascending the stairs.

“Yes, yes—unfortunately yes, Mr. Simons. It is of a terribly serious character this time, you can form some idea yourself. My poor child has been pretty near murdered.”

“What can you tell me of the affair?” Simons asked, his keen eyes roving about the disordered room.

“Nothing at all, really. We heard a terrific scream; we ran hither; we had to burst in the door, for it was locked: we found my child lying in the centre of the floor, bathed in her own blood—Ah! who is this!”

“I am Mr. Simons’s assistant,” responded a voice from the doorway.

A young man in a plain, genteel suit, wearing a dark slouch hat, having a slight mustache, his hair cut short and neat, was standing there—an utter stranger to the detective.

Like a flash he saw who it was—saw and mar-

veled; for so perfect was the disguise that, but for the fact of his partly expecting it, he never would have recognized Madeline Damer!

“You are Mr. Allsworth, I believe. My name is Marc Ludley. I am to work with Mr. Simons on this case,” said the masquerading Madeline, in an astonishing man’s voice.

“If you are to assist Mr. Simons, I trust that, between you, this mystery will be solved.”

The detective, concealing a smile, moved about the room, examining here and there, much after the same manner as he had on the previous night.

There seemed to be no possible means of ingress with the door locked. Carefully, and imitated by his admirably disguised assistant, he searched for everything that might prove a tell-tale on whoever had by some mysterious means, gained access to the chamber.

Jack Simons and Marc Ludley came together at the window. It was the latter who, by a quick motion, called attention to something on the outer projection of the broad sill.

Simons gazed in astonishment. He leaned over and looked out, measuring with his glance the distance to the ground.

“Mr. Allsworth, step here a minute.”

Mr. Allsworth approached, when the detective pointed to the sill.

“Great Heaven!”

There on the sill, plainly marked, was a bloody imprint, as if made by a human palm and fingers.

“A man’s hand!” exclaimed Allsworth.

“Looks like it.”

“The print is made with my daughter’s blood!”

The would-be assassin has evidently vaulted out at the window. I can understand how easy it was to do that and, by chance, escape crippling injuries by striking the ground below. But how did he get in?—that is where I am baffled. Bring a candle, or lamp, if you have one convenient.”

When a lighted candle was brought to him, he extended it out and over toward the white water-spout, fully three feet distant. It was a mere impulse; he did not expect to discover anything in that direction.

But almost instantly he drew the light in again and turned to the others. There was a blank, surprised, perplexed expression in his face.

“Unaccountable as it may seem,” he said, “the party has, beyond any doubt, descended by the water-spout.”

“How do you know?”

“There is a stripe of blood on it.”

“Ah! more of my daughter’s precious blood,” groaned Allsworth. “But why do you say that it is unaccountable?”

Marc Ludley, equally surprised by the discovery that had been made, would have advanced the same reasons that the detective proceeded to give.

CHAPTER XIV.

A REVELATION MOST STRANGE.

“STOP and think,” said Simons, in reply. “The spout is, if anything, over three feet from the sill. It is of square mold, sets close to the bricks, there is no space for a hold behind it. The average length of a man’s arm, taken from the under side, is about two feet six inches to the second finger-tip. To reach and grasp at that distance there must be some leaning, and when letting go the frame there is both a swinging and downward jar. The spout is frailly set, not more than sheathed an inch at the joints, only held to the brick-work by far-apart slim bands of tin with a single nail in the mortar on each side, barely what is necessary to retain its perpendicular, with the whole weight resting upon the iron elbow at the ground. The combined swinging jar and weight of an ordinary man would have dislocated the spout at the point of his contact, undoubtedly bringing it and himself down in a wreck to the ground.”

“And yet a man has accomplished both ascent and descent, leaving behind the tell-tale blood smear.”

“He must have descended by that way, anyhow. The marks show it.”

“After your reasoning against the possibility this seems extraordinary.”

“It is extraordinary,” agreed the detective.

“Can you offer any theory?”

“I think I can.”

“What is it?”

“The intruder was not a man.”

“Not a man!” echoed both Allsworth and Ludley, immensely surprised.

At this juncture they were attracted by a little cry from Finfin.

“The ma’m’selle is coming to herself, messieurs!” she spoke, in accents of genuine joy.

Allsworth hastened to the bedside. Simons and Ludley held back from an intrusion upon the young lady in the first moments of her consciousness.

As they stood aside, Ludley whispered:

“We will soon have a key to the mystery.”

“How do you mean?”

“Before Cecilia Allsworth fainted I heard her moan out that she now knew who had stolen the jewels.”

"Ah!" lowly aspirated the detective, with quickened interest.

Allsworth here beckoned them forward. As they advanced, Finfin stepped away around the foot of the couch, where a part of the torn curtain that remained hanging screened her from observation.

She leaned slightly forward, intent upon hearing what was said; one hand pressed to her bosom, while her dusky face wore a half-frightened look, as if she anticipated and dreaded what was to come.

Cecilia lay holding her father's hand. The blue eyes were milder now; his presence seemed to greatly strengthen her.

"Cecilia, my child—you are better?"

"Yes. But I am very, very weak. Give me some wine, please."

The stimulant was placed to her lips.

"Are you strong enough to tell us just what has happened, Cecilia?" he asked, tenderly replacing her head on the pillow.

"Happened! Oh, I wish I could forget it!"

"These gentlemen are detectives. It is necessary that they should have quickly any explanation that you can give, so that they may act."

She looked at them searchingly.

"I have had a terrible experience."

"Tell us all about it," spoke Simons, respectfully.

"It is but a scrap, after all. I had come to my room to retire for the night. I had locked my door and taken a few steps forward before I made an overpowering discovery. My empty jewel-box was on the bureau, where it had remained since your visit last evening. In front of the bureau, with the box in hand, examining, turning it over and over, was the most horrid shape my eyes ever beheld."

"A man, my child?"

"No—no, not a man!"

The detective glanced at his companion in a way that said:

"I told you so!"

"Yet it was like a man," Cecilia continued: "upright, with arms, legs, a Satanic face set with burning eyeballs, its body hairy and savagely disgusting. It was a chimpanzee!"

"A chimpanzee!" echoed her listeners, together.

"I ran at the brute, without pausing to think of his vicious strength. Immediately I was assaulted with blows, scratches, and in its fury the beast struck me upon the head with the box. We had a hard struggle. I wonder at my temerity in commencing such a battle. Soon I was blinded by blood. Then the box descended on my head a second time. I shrieked and sunk exhausted in the very clutches of the disgusting monster. I knew no more after that. It must have been that same animal took the jewels."

A chimpanzee! This was a new phase, indeed! Jack Simons was deeply and rapidly reflecting. To whom did the chimpanzee belong? Who had trained him to so artfully rob ladies' jewelry-boxes without disturbing anything else? Had the animal come to the room on this second occasion to search for more treasure?—or did there exist a plot to murder the young lady for some hidden cause of malice?

"Have you, or your daughter, any enemies, Mr. Allsworth?"

"Not one in the world that I have been made aware of."

"This is strange."

"What shall you do?"

"Let us descend to the parlor and I will tell you."

They left the room. No one could have heard the scarcely audible sigh that came from the lips of the listening Finfin, behind the curtain, something like this:

"Ah, mon Dieu! It is Lepo who has done this. The wicked Lepo! It is too bad. And I dare not to speak a word. Ah, mon Dieu!"

She came around to the side of the bed, kneeling there, with her face buried in the soft covering.

"There, Finfin, do not weep," Cecilia said, gently stroking the girl's head. "I am not hurt, dangerously, and the fright is over, now. What a room! Haste and put it to rights, Finfin. And that window—it has been open all this time. Close and securely latch it; I feel chilled."

"Yes, ma'm'selle."

As the trio descended the stairs, Allsworth in advance, Simons and Ludley exchanged a few whispered words:

"This is looking decidedly bad," remarked the detective.

"I will have a conference with you later; there is no time now. But of one thing I am becoming convinced."

"And that?"

"Harry Daymon is not implicated in the jewelry burglary. He is honestly ignorant of everything that has transpired."

"Then there does not appear to be any need of my spying upon him."

"There you are wrong. I have as much—if not more—cause to shadow Henry Daymon's movements, as I ever had."

"Wherefore, pray?"

"I want you to watch his correspondence while he is confined to his bed. I must know the contents of every letter he receives, either directed to his office or his home, before he himself sees it—mind, I say *before* he sees it. You go, now, to his rooms, as the attendant he expects. Say that you were requested to call by Mr. Jerry Smyrck; that you have had considerable experience in hospitals. I am entirely satisfied with your 'make-up'—your disguise. Go, now."

"Where can I find you, if needed in a hurry?"

"I will make close interval reports at the office, if possible."

Marc Ludley left the house. Simons and Allsworth entered the parlor.

"Now, Mr. Simons?" inquiringly.

"Mr. Allsworth, I do not wish to occasion you any rude alarm. But it is necessary for me to speak my thoughts plainly."

"Do so, please."

"I think there is something more in this mystery than the mere object of robbery."

"Why, what can it be?"

"I believe your daughter's life is threatened."

"Great heavens!"

"There is a murderous enemy at work."

"But what enemies could Cecilia have? She is as innocent of having injured any one as a babe."

"I have stated my opinion, and I mean to base my action on it," declared the detective, emphatically. "This chimpanzee has a master who has taught him to rob ladies' jewel-boxes. The mystery of the ascent and descent of the water-spout is exposed—such an animal could easily perform it. But, why should there have been a second visit, and to the same room, when the jewels were already made off with? I can only answer that with the theory that the beast was sent there—and perhaps it was intended in the first instance—to destroy Miss Allsworth. Her brave resistance and screams frightened the assailant off, barely saving her life."

Allsworth was shocked and trembling.

CHAPTER XV.

A REMARKABLE DEATH.

"AND is there no way, Mr. Simons, to insure the safety of my child? Is there no way to get at the bloodthirsty fiend?—supposing your theory to be the correct one."

"I have a clew, I think."

"Ah! you have?"

"Watch the movements of Finfin closely—"

"Finfin! Then you begin to share my suspicions of her, after all?"

"I have no really tangible ground as yet. But, watch her. Let her not have any idea of the surveillance. Do this yourself—do not lisp a word to others. I may hint that I am already on the track of a mystery concerning the girl. Something may come of it."

"I will do as you suggest."

"I shall depend upon you to be discreet. Now, Mr. Allsworth, I have rather a startling proposition to make. Let me assure you before stating it, that it will not only prevent any further attempts upon your daughter's life, but will aid me materially in hunting down her criminal enemies, by completely hoodwinking them."

"Let me hear your plans."

A long conversation ensued.

When they emerged from the parlor, John Allsworth's face was of a ghastly whiteness; he shook with a pent up excitement. Jack Simons appeared perfectly composed, as if what had passed between them had been merely some matter of ordinary kind.

"Sammy," Mr. Allsworth said, as he walked to the door with the detective, and a dressing the hall servant there, "remain at your post for an hour longer. Either this gentleman, or a messenger from him, will bring a package here within that time. See that I get it, the instant it comes."

Jack then left the mansion. He had an errand to perform. Fortune favored him at the moment; a hack was moving leisurely along, just beyond the curb, perhaps returning from the delivery of a theater party.

Hailing the driver, and quickly making a bargain, Simons stepped inside and was whirled away toward the Northern Liberties.

At a two-story building the hack halted. Jack alighted and rung the bell, bidding the driver await him.

Over the doorway, in dully-shiny gilt letters, was the name:

MADAME D'ESTE.

Receptions in French, Italian and English.

"The cove comes from a 'ton' house. Wonder what's up atween him an' that fortuneteller?" mumbled the hackman, *sotto voce*.

Visitors were an exception at the hour of midnight, but after some persistence the detective was admitted.

At the expiration of about twenty minutes he reappeared and was driven back to the mansion on Massachusetts avenue. Sammy was at his post.

"Give this to Mr. Allsworth, and say that I

will see him in the morning," handing the servant a small package as he spoke.

The hack then took him to the agency on Fifteenth street where it was dismissed.

He was admitted by the watch-clerk. Proceeding to the back room, and turning up the gas there, he seated himself before a desk and drew forth a long-shaped diary.

There were important notes to be made in that diary. The detective was about to play a deep game.

It lacked but two hours of dawn when the muffled figure of a man came burriedly forth from the Allsworth mansion and started off on a half run through the frosty air.

Sammy, the hall servant, it was.

Turning from the avenue into Ninth street, he halted at a house with a portico stoop, and gave the bell a wrench that nearly tore the knob from its socket.

"Who is there?" demanded a voice almost at Sammy's ear, coming from a speaking-tube in the framing.

"A messenger from Mr. Allsworth. Is that you, Doctor Dalright?"

"Yes. What is the matter?"

"A deal more than I can tell you, sir, a talkin' here. I've a letter for you, from Mr. Allsworth. For good heaven's sake, sir, come down an' get it. There's awful times up to the house."

Doctor Dalright, family physician to the Allsworths, was not the individual to disregard a call from so wealthy a patron.

Hastily drawing on slippers, pants and dressing-gown he descended.

Sammy handed him a sealed envelope.

"I know they want you in a big hurry, doctor. But the letter will tell you all about it, I guess. I must run right back. I'm needed there."

Dalright returned to his chamber and broke open the missive.

Then he recoiled, staring at the written lines in speechless amazement.

This was what he read:

"MY DEAR DOCTOR:—Come at once. My daughter has been attacked by a burglar. I apprehend that sheer fright has killed her; she lays white and motionless, like one dead. All our efforts to revive her are futile. I dread the worst. No time to be lost if anything can possibly be done for her."

"JNO. ALLSWORTH."

"Gracious sakes!" burst from the physician. In a very brief space he was on his way to the mansion.

The most astonished and truly horrified person was Finfin, the French maid. She had left her mistress, between one and two o'clock in the dark morning, in an apparent condition of thorough recovery from the effects of her extraordinary encounter. Cecilia had quietly expressed to Finfin and her father a desire to sleep. He remained in the bed-chamber, fearing that she might arouse and, in a lingering memory of her recent terror, perhaps would need his assuring voice.

Hardly an hour later Allsworth had knocked at Finfin's door, awakening her, and announcing, in a voice of thrilling trepidation, that he believed his daughter was dying.

Sammy—who appeared to be general messenger as well as hall-servant—was brought, scrambling and scared from his bed, and dispatched for the physician.

Doctor Dalright made a careful examination, with several tests. He was soon satisfied that Cecilia was dead; his skill could accomplish nothing there.

Surprisedly he listened to Allsworth's story of the events of the night. But he was not informed that the burglar was other than a man.

"Wonderful! Terrible!" he exclaimed.

"Ah! it is indeed terrible to me, doctor."

"My dear Mr. Allsworth, of course you would not wish your daughter subjected to a post-mortem—"

Allsworth interrupted by a wave of the hand while a transient shudder convulsed him.

"I could not endure it."

"No. Ahem! Of course not. But—"

"You have only been in attendance upon us for a short period, Doctor Dalright. Cecilia has never yet required your services. You do not know that she inherits a heart trouble from her mother."

"Oh, that's it!"

"It has never been considered sufficiently serious to invite medical treatment. But this severe shock, I reasonably presume, has developed the affliction into the sad catastrophe of death."

"Undoubtedly. That explains it. My dear sir, I hardly know what to say in this sudden, this poignant sorrow that has come upon you. To be sure, it would be—be—a grievous ordeal to you to have a post-mortem. Yes. I can give my certificate. I will see the coroner and have a talk with him. There can be no doubt that death resulted from heart disease in this instance. Communicate speedily with the authorities, sir. The ruffian must be caught."

"I have taken that step already."

"Good. I hope the murderous scoundrel will have short shrift."

When the doctor arose to depart Allsworth

made as if to accompany him to the door, passing out to the entry with him.

Finfin, left alone in the room, threw herself on her knees beside the couch where Cecilia lay, so white, so still and cold, with the hue of death on her brow and waxen hands.

"Ah, mon Dieu!" she sobbed, in hysterical woe. "My poor mistress who I have so learn to love! You are dead—dead! Wicked, wicked Lepo, to do this thing! And I dare not speak what I know, for cruel Jacques will send me back to France, to the prison, that nasty cell at Toulon! Oh, miserable me!"

She did not observe the face of John Allsworth looking around the door-frame. He could hear every word of the girl's weeping utterance.

CHAPTER XVI.

SINGULAR DISCLOSURES.

THE sudden and unearthly cries that sounded within the Cornish residence at that late hour of the night as shown, while dully audible to the occupants, could not have been heard by any one upon the outside, because of the thick walls for which the building was noted and the fact of the source of the startling noises being confined to the windowless closet-room in the third story.

The effect upon Mrs. Cornish and Lyn was similar and simultaneous. They hurried out into and met in the entry.

The half-smothered sound ceased.

"Lyn, you heard it?"

"Yes. It is very mysterious; it sounded to me as if inside this house."

"What could it have been?"

"I am at a loss to even imagine."

"Do you think it could have been a human voice?"

"It did not strike me as being such—"

"Hark!"

There was a short, snapping sound—evidently located on the floor above—like the explosion of a cap on the nipple of an empty-barreled pistol. This was followed instantaneously by a prolonged yell, or yelp, its unearthly intonation half smothered as before.

Lyn started hastily up the stairs, his mother following.

They now distinguished an angry voice—the voice of a man and recognizable to them—and blending with it a low, whining, continuous tone of some one or something in mortal terror and extreme pain.

It was an easy matter to trace the source of the mystery. Lyn, with Mrs. Cornish close behind him, pushed open the door of the closet-room.

They paused on the threshold, thunderstruck. It was certainly an astonishing sight they saw.

In the center stood Monsieur Derdier in his shirt-sleeves. He held, in a wrathful grasp, the short handled whip we have mentioned; he was just gathering it for another stroke at some cowering object in one corner.

This object was a great, ugly, brown-haired chimpanzee!

For a moment Lyn and Mrs. Cornish were too amazed for utterance. And as they looked mutely at the man and the beast, the short handled whip lashed mercilessly outward, cracking, cutting on the animal's hide, wringing forth a screech of torture.

"What does this mean?" demanded Lyn, frowning, at last finding speech.

"It means zat ze grand rascal—ze rascal Lepo!—he run away and hide from me. I teach him! Ha! I show to him when I say go not out, he s'all make himself to obey ze command!"

"What does it mean, I say? What are you doing with such a thing as that in this house?"

M. Derdier seemed for the first to realize who it was that had intruded upon his remarkable little exhibition.

His boiling wrath either vanished entirely, or was placed under wonderful control, as he turned to them, bowing low, while his lips smiled till the high-curling mustache curled higher, showing his white, even-rowed teeth gleamingly.

"I crave ze pardon of madame and monsieur. Lepo—my valuable Lepo—sometime he not mind me. I have him to punish. He run away from me zis night. I know not how much mischief he have done, somewhere, when I not wiz him. I would not have wish to disturb you, but I been so angry wiz Lepo I cannot wait till ze morning to a-vvip him."

M. Derdier had replaced his coat, and came from the room, locking the door, bowing before them again in the entry.

"How long has this thing been going on?" Lyn interrogated.

"Going on, monsieur?" inquiringly.

"Yes. How long have you been making a menagerie of this house?"

"I make not a menagerie of ze house," said M. Derdier, humbly. "Lepo is ze great pet of my life. I have him more zan five year ago from Malacca. I carry him all ze time in England, while I serve faithfully Monsieur Lloyn Ambrose. He is wort' much to me."

"Take him down in the yard, and in the morning get rid of him."

"Ah, monsieur! But Lepo is so delicate of ze weat'er. He would a-die of ze cold—positive!"

"So much the better if he does. I will not have the beast in this house. Come, out with him!"

"I cannot do zat, monsieur," was the firm but mild rejoinder.

Lyn flushed, that the man—whom he considered no more than a lackey—should dare to thus plainly oppose his order.

"If you do not at once remove the disagreeable thing, I shall throw both it and you out on the street step!" he cried, hotly.

The Frenchman's eyes kindled with a set, sparkling fire. He glanced toward Mrs. Cornish, whose gaze grew restless under his intent look. The orbs of M. Derdier seemed to hold a power over her.

"And madame—what have she to say? I s'all put my pet, my Lepo, out in ze freeze cold night to a-die—eh? In ze morning I could betair move him away, since monsieur not likes to have him here."

"I say he must go now—right away!" insisted the young man. "The idea of a dirty ape being bed-roomed in this house!"

"But, Lyn," interposed Mrs. Cornish, influenced by the Frenchman's eyes, "it would be sheer cruelty to expose the creature to this night's cold air. Monsieur Derdier can take it away in the morning; I am sure that can suffice. There is no need of a quarrel."

"Quarrel! I quarrel with him? But have your way."

He wheeled short around and left them. Mrs. Cornish, more slowly, followed down the staircase.

She had entered the rich ante room to her bed-chamber, when there was a quick step behind her.

M. Derdier pushed his way inside, closing the door after him.

In his eyes was a vindictive gleam. He smiled that teeth-showing smile which is not unusual with the display of passion in his race.

"Madame?"

"Well, Monsieur Derdier," in surprise, "what do you wish here?"

"You will please to take ze chair while I s'all speak something to you."

Mrs. Cornish was palpably affected by his manner, which contained a hint of menace under polished tone and gesture. She seated herself uneasily.

"I have come to you, madame, to have you understand zat I am ze master," and he laid one hand, with a slap, on the marble-top table at his side.

"Well, Monsieur Derdier?"

"You know zat—eh?"

"I have never disputed the point with you—as to pecuniary matters."

"But ze time has arrive when you s'all must tell it to ze boy, Lyn, zat wizout me you, he too, would not a bee here, wiz zis wealt', zis—Pah! Je vous dirai en bon Français, que je n'en veux point! You believe when you—what you call him?—skylark—abroad wiz Monsieur Lloyn Ambrose, and he die at ze hotel in city London, zat he have much wealt'—zat he leave everything for you. Eh—it is so?"

"I judge that Lloyn Ambrose must have left considerable money, to so long maintain Lyn and myself in the position we have gained in society," returned Mrs. Cornish, her calmness costing an effort. "It has been made quite plain to me, also, in these years since his decease, that you, Monsieur Derdier—his valet and secretary—have this wealth concealed in some strange way. There does not appear to be any bank account of consequence; yet you always seem to have the money when needed. Lyn, as long as his pockets have been so abundantly supplied, has evinced no particular interest regarding the extent of his inheritance. For myself, when I say I am in need of money it comes. What more need I ask?"

"Aha! it is quite true. Ze money come—eh? Now how would it suit ze proud, ze social Madame Cornish if she lose ze wealt', ze standing, ze all? What if you s'all lose everything, and be so poor like ze beggar on ze street? Eh—how would madame survive zat?"

"What do you mean?" broke from her, busily.

His latent threat, his scintillating eyes alarmed her. She well knew that if he chose to withhold the mysterious source, she was ruined. An all-powerful secret it was, that M. Derdier held grimly in his brain.

There was a sardonic grin on the Frenchman's face as he said:

"I have ze power, madame, to crush you out like ze worm!"

"Why do you threaten me? What have I done?"

"Wait, madame. I will tell you of what I mean. You have mistake. Monsieur Lloyn Ambrose nevair have one dollair put away. He leave when he die in city London—nothing."

She looked at him in amazement.

"Then how—"

"Wait, madame. You s'all hear ze story I will tell."

He drew his chair a few inches nearer to her and lowered his voice.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CORNISH "SKELETON."

"ZE Monsieur Lloyn Ambrose, wiz whom you run away from your husband, from America, was one fine fellow—sacre! one grand scamp!—but all ze same, a vair fine fellow. He spend ze money, give ze receptions, make of you a grand madame in ze city London. But you have not know zat he was one vair big t'ief—eh?"

"A thief? Lloyn Ambrose a thief!"

"Listen, madame. You will remember Monsieur Ambrose leave you frequent for trips to ze Continent."

"Yes. His absences he would never explain to me."

"Eh, bien! He go to Paris every time. Why? I will tell you. In ze city Paris he belong to ze grand gang of ze garrote. I, too, was of ze gang. By zis he make hees living. It is so easy wiz ze money to fool ze Americans; when ze gang one time commit ze murder atrocious, he and I must fly. We come here. He meet you. He dazzle you. You run away wiz him. He take you to ze city London, by ze name Cornish. From there he make up ze gang again in Paris. Once more he have of money plenty. Zen one time he come home wiz a bad wound. Ze bullet have take him in ze vital. When he is dying he say to me: 'Take you a-care of madame. Take you a-care of my boy.' Ze boy, you know, is Monsieur Lyn, of ze ot'er wife he have, who die when ze boy been five year old. You have learn to love Monsieur Lyn greatly; he love you and call you his mot'er. I make oat' to ze dying man zat I care for you and for Monsieur Lyn. I have keep zat oat' faithful. Why? We were of ze gang. Ze oat' of ze gang was so sacred to me. But you think Monsieur Lloyn Ambrose was wound by ze duel—eh?"

"That was his statement to me on his deathbed," rejoined Mrs. Cornish, strainedly.

She was shifting restlessly in her seat. M. Derdier's disclosures were mysterious, unpleasant, and there was evidently more and worse to come.

"Again a mistake," he said, with peculiar intensity. "Monsieur Ambrose was shot by ze police, who near catch him in ze window of a house he rob. Monsieur Lyn change his name to Cornish, because his fat'er say, wiz his last breath, Lyn s'all inherit heap money by ze change. You think all zat—eh? You have anot'er mistake, madame. Monsieur Ambrose, eef he was ze rascal, he love his son; he wish to spare him ze ignominy if it sould ever be found zat ze parent was one of ze great gang of ze Paris garrote. You begin to see, madame, ze grand-rascal-of-a-gentleman was zis Monsieur Lloyn Ambrose."

"This is almost incredible!" exclaimed the astonished woman.

"Ha! it is true."

"I cannot doubt you—having, as you always seemed to have, a mysteriously intimate confidence with Lloyn Ambrose. But if all this is really true, then where—whence comes our seemingly inexhaustible supply of wealth? I do not comprehend."

Another, a more intense gleam came into the Frenchman's eyes. He did not immediately answer. His silence brought to her cheeks an alternate flush and pallor of suspense.

"Tell me," she questioned, breathlessly; "where do we get all this money?"

"I have provide zat."

"But how do you do it?"

"Wiz my Lepo!" and he pointed a finger upward, as if to indicate the room and the beast on the third floor.

"Lepo! That chimpanzee?"

"Yes, madame. To Lepo we owe ze everything. Him I have trained till he can do more zan any man—he is quick, silent, he nevair fail."

"I am at a loss to understand you."

"He is ze one cunning t'ief."

"He climb anywhere. He bring to me when I s'all command. Ze jewels, ze gold, ze silver of ze fine ladies. Ze stones I break and cut new; ze gold, ze silver, I melt into ze little brick. I sell ze stones, ze bricks—off somewhere—and we have ze plenty money."

"Heavens! Then we are living, every day, upon the proceeds of burglaries!" burst from Mrs. Cornish, in frightened astoundment.

"Zat is it, precise."

"Why, this is awful. It must go no further."

"What s'all madame do about it? She betray me—eh? Zen she suffer ze arrest of an accomplice. She lose ze grand scale of society; at her ze finger of ze public point. Zey easy believe, too, ze woman wicked enough to run away from her husband wiz anot'er man s'all be bad enough to do worse. You see—eh? To ze prison we all go toget'er."

Mrs. Cornish pressed both hands hard to her temples. Wealth, society prominence, were a dear idol of her worldly heart. She could not sacrifice her proud position for one of degradation. Truly was M. Derdier the master. He held her at his mercy!

"You will now understand me, madame, zat if Lepo s'all be lost, we all are lost. Lepo s'ould have ze best of ze house—vair secretly, howeve', you can see. He is ze—what you say?—ze stand-by. I think I have speak enough. Lepo s'all be ze respected, ze unseen boardair of ze house. You will arrange wiz ze boy Lyn about it."

"Yes, yes, I will talk with him. Heaven only knows what he will do when he learns of this—this terrible state of circumstances."

"Ha, h—a! I think he will a close shut hees mout'; else I have him, too, in ze jail wiz me as ze grand accomplice. You tell him zat for true."

He arose, bowing with that infernal grin raising his curled mustache up to the sides of his nose.

"Madame, I have ze honair to bid you good-night."

At the door he paused to bow again—the sinuous-limbed, polished-mannered villain!—and then withdrew with a phantom noiselessness.

Mrs. Cornish could not close her eyes in sleep that night. With haggard face she sought Lyn's sleeping apartments. Fortunately for her intentions, he was smoking a cigar before retiring.

The detail of the interview that ensued need not be recorded here. It was one of mingling surprise, incredulity, fear, anger, protest, argument, pleading, and Mrs. Cornish shed impudent tears.

The tangle of the wily Frenchman's power was a web of iron. Loss of wealth and station would be excruciating enough to endure; but to be dragged down to disgraceful imprisonment, as participant in a felony—and the trial of a case could not be decided otherwise than by conviction, if the Frenchman made such a sworn declaration as he had threatened, it becoming obvious that there was no other source for the maintenance of such splendid style—this would be heaping "Helicon on Ossa!"

The chimpzee triumphed.

But into two lives had come a torture of horror. Two persons in the gay, luxury-lolling city of Washington felt that they were living on the brink of an abyss where one false move, one betraying step of M. Derdier's would hurl them to uttermost degradation.

It was day-dawn when Mrs. Cornish threw herself, only partly disrobed, on her costly-soft couch, dropping, from sheer mental exhaustion, into a restless slumber.

But by eleven o'clock in the morning, when she appeared dressed for driving out, no one would have suspected the dread secret that gnawed within her.

It was the hour of her purposed visit to Senator Slapp. She was nerved to a wonderful calmness for the task of the plot against Bilspoon.

She supported her own handsome livery; soon it was in waiting for her orders at the front door.

"Drive west for a few squares, then down Pennsylvania venue to the east side of the Capitol—Senate entrance," she instructed.

As the attractive coach moved along Massachusetts avenue, her attention was arrested by a display of heavy draping *crêpe* on the bell-knob of a magnificent corner mansion. She leaned forward for a better view.

Simultaneously a window curtain was drawn aside at one of the upper stories, and the face of John Allsworth appeared there distinctly behind the panes.

She drew suddenly back amid the rich cushions a startled breath escaping her.

"Heavens! The dead cannot come to life! Yet that man was surely John Allsworth!"

Quick though she had withdrawn her unvailed face, Allsworth, his eyes fixed on the coach—the only object of attraction just then in the street—had seen her.

He let fall the curtain, half-staggering back from the window, as if smitten by a painful vision.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOVEMENTS IN MEDLEY.

JACK SIMONS, after having made the essential memoranda in his diary, had snatched a brief interval of repose on the lounge in the rear room of the agency.

By eight o'clock in the morning he was astir, made a hurried toilet with conveniences there, and started out.

His course was to Seventh street. Entering a public building opposite the post-office, he ascended to and opened a door on which was a frosted panel bearing the name of Henry Daymon, agent, Fire and Life Insurance Company.

Only the janitor of the building was there, dusting the furniture.

"Mr. Daymon in?" Simons inquired.

"No, sir. He doesn't generally come before nine o'clock."

"Ah! I am too early."

"His clerk gets in about half-past eight."

"Yes?—the clerk will do, then. I shall wait."

Seating himself, he took up a morning paper, and ostensibly plunged into its newsy columns.

The janitor presently withdrew, saying:

"It won't be long now before the clerk's in."

"All right."

A few moments thereafter a sprucely-tailored young fellow, with hair parted in the middle, and wearing a choker celluloid that compelled his beardless chin to a dignified elevation, made his appearance, bestowing upon the visitor a glance of extensive self-importance.

"Good-morning, sir," he vouchsafed, with the air of a potentate whose civility is abbreviated by a crowd of business.

"Good-morning. You are Mr. Daymon's clerk?"

"Yes, sir. I am Mr. Daymon's assistant, sir. What can I do for you? Mr. Daymon is not yet in. Is there anything I can transact in his absence?"

"Yes, I think you can," said Simons, rising. "Please show me the letter-press book in which Mr. Daymon's recent letters have been copied—those in his own handwriting, I mean—"

"Sir?"

"Be in a hurry. Observe this. I have not much time," exhibiting, as he spoke, the talismanic badge worn under his coat lapel.

"Oh, certainly, sir; certainly. I hope there isn't anything—"

"Never mind about your hopes. Get out the book."

The copying book was produced with alacrity.

Simons drew a folded letter from his pocket, and opening the book at random, spread the letter on a page, comparing the chirography of the two.

If the surprised clerk hoped to gain, by speech or look, any inkling of what this singular proceeding meant, he was disappointed.

"That will do, my young friend," Jack said, closing the book. "Now, listen carefully to me. Mr. Daymon is quite ill, confined to his residence. He may not come to his office for several days. If he sends for you, as likely he will, you are not to make the slightest mention, to him or anybody else, of having seen me, or of what has passed here. This is a plain warning I am giving you. Disregard it, and you will find yourself suddenly locked up where you can wag your tongue at the walls. Remember."

With which injunction the detective departed, leaving the clerk in bewilderment.

He had accomplished a valuable point by comparison of the letter he carried with the letter in the copying-book.

Thence he went to the office of the *Critic*.

"Send a reporter to No. — Massachusetts avenue," he said to the party behind the counter.

"What's up in that direction?"

"Send the reporter and let him find out."

As he was passing onward, along the north side of "F" street, opposite the Ebbitt House, the sight of two persons a little way ahead, arrested him.

One was the diminutive A. D. Telegraph lad who had delivered the dispatch for John Smedley, Esq., on the previous night. The little fellow was off duty, now, probably on his way to his home, if he had one, to rest the little legs and sleepy head, ere reporting again for his vigorous night service. The boy's face was turned toward the detective, and again he was forcibly impressed by the remarkable resemblance to John Allsworth, even in one of tender years.

The other was a handsomely-suited man, whose face was turned away.

The boy seemed cowed in his companion's presence—the latter apparently doing all the talking. The expression of his features was half-dogged, half-resentful.

The moment they separated Simons stepped forward.

"My boy, I want to speak with you."

"Oh, I know who you are!" was the exclamation, with brightening eyes.

"You know me?"

"You're one of the detec's, up in Fifteenth street."

"Well, I have a few questions to ask you."

"I haven't been doing anything," apprehensively.

"No, not that I know of. You have nothing to fear from me. What is your name?"

"Lor', I've had a dozen since I can remember. I'm called Tip, now."

"Tip, eh? Where do you live?"

"Since I'm on the telegraph I rent a room that's got a bed, a stool, a lookin'-glass, and a wash-bowl into it; take my meals round just when I get hungry, like 'blood' fellers."

Tip, when off duty, was very different from Tip when on business for the company. Small as he was, his employers valued him highly. He never loitered with a dispatch; he never lost time in any useless conversation when summoned by the electric wire.

"Tip, have you no father or mother?"

The boy's head drooped. If ever human features told the tale of an empty heart, the picture was outlined there. A single tear, one in each bonny eye, arose glistening to the lid, while his lips wavered out:

"I s'pose I had both a father and mother once. But they must 'a' died—or they didn't care anything about me, I guess. Ever since I've been big enough to holler a morning paper, I've had to hoe it for myself. I used to sell papers before I got on the telegraph messengers. I've

done a heap of knockin' about at one thing 'r 'nother. Sometimes I feel 's if I must be older 'n nine years, I've seen so much. No, I guess my father and mother must 'a' died before I knew 'em."

"How do you happen to know that you are nine years old?"

"Oh, he says so—that man you saw me talking to."

"Who is he?"

"That's more'n I'll ever tell you. He's Jacques; that's all I know."

"Jacques!" the echo broke from the detective's lips with a start.

That name contained a thrilling interest for him.

"Yes. He's about the only friend I ever seemed to have in this world. He always had a dollar or two, to help me start fresh again, when I got bu'sted; always seemed to be hangin' on my tracks anywhere I'd go, 's if he didn't want to lose sight of me. But, do you know, I'm kind of afraid of him, though he's done a heap for me. I feel 's if I was in his power, somehow, and can't get away from him. He has awful eyes."

"Where does this Jacques live, my boy?"

"There you come again. I don't know any more'n the man in the moon."

"Do you want to make ten dollars?"

"I'd be a fool if I didn't."

"Find out exactly where Jacques lives; report the information to nobody but me—you know where my office is—and I will pay you ten dollars."

"All right. That's a go. I don't know when I'll meet him again, though. He pops up here and he pops up there, like the Humpty Dumpty man I've seen at the theater."

"Well, keep a bright eye for him and track him home. The ten dollars will be waiting for you."

When he arrived at the agency, Jack Simons found Lyon there, and he bewildered the senior detective by announcing, point-blank:

"I have just had an interesting conversation with John Allsworth's son."

"John Allsworth's son!" repeated the chief. "What the deuce are you talking about? Didn't know he had a son; and the family has been pretty clearly under my knowledge for nine years."

"That is just the point. Nine years."

"What are you driving at?"

"Did I not understand you to say, when you explained to me your own business dealing with Allsworth, that his wife eloped about nine years ago with some society lion?"

"Yes, yes," interestedly.

"And about three months after her flight she wrote to her husband, stating that she had given birth to a child; after which, nothing more was heard of her?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, that child was a boy; he is now about nine years old; he is in Washington; he is not much larger than a toad; he goes by the name of Tip; I can put my hand on him at any hour—What is the matter?"

Lyon had leaped from his chair, rubbing his hands gleefully.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN INTERCEPTED LETTER.

"SIMONS, my dear boy!" exclaimed the senior detective, "there is a standing offer, in Allsworth's own handwriting, of \$5,000 for the discovery and delivery to him of that child. Though he doesn't know whether it is a boy or a girl. Here's a lucky stroke, sure."

"Well, I am quite positive that I cannot be mistaken," Simons declared, with emphasis. "The boy's face is the very image of Allsworth's; he never knew his father and mother—been a sort of waif ever since he could waddle."

They were interrupted by the entrance of a tall, whiskered gentleman. The comer was well known to Washington officials as Alex. Allison, a shrewd member of the United States Secret Service.

There are some who imagine that a "Government detective" is—well, a Government detective; that he attends to any and all manner of service requiring the skill of his profession. Whereas, there are numerous utterly distinct branches, belonging severally to the departments of pension, post-office, justice, treasury, public lands, customs, etc.

Alex. Allison had won notability for himself in connection with the treasury.

Saluting the two familiarly, he said:

"Now, Simons, I am after you. I have a chance for you. You have been wanting an appointment in the Government service for some time."

"True, Alex. But what is my chance?"

"You're not going to rob me of Jack, I hope?" protested Lyon, jocularly.

"I have, I think, an opportunity for him to distinguish himself in a Government case, which, if successful, will open the way to an appointment. Look at this, will you?"

He handed forth a crisp twenty-dollar bill.

"What is the matter with it?"

"Don't you see any flaw in it?"

"No. It looks perfect enough, paper and all."

"That is just the give-away. The note is perfect. Now look at this," handing out another of the same denomination and seemingly of the same plate. "You will observe that last has a flaw mark near the lower left-hand corner on the back. See it?"

"Yes, plain enough."

"Yet it did not strike the brains of a gang of criminals as being of any particular import. The perfect note is a counterfeit—an astonishingly good one. These twenty-dollar bills are circulating, as if by concert, in Philadelphia, New York, Chicago and Columbus. I have been detailed to work the thing out. I shall require help. I think Jack Simons is the man I want with me on the case."

Jack's bold black eyes twinkled peculiarly.

"I think I can place you on the right scent immediately."

"You can!"

"Yes. The chances are, you will not have to leave Washington to find the plates that printed those notes."

"But that is ridiculous. They would not be so bold as to conduct their printing operations here at the capital—"

"Quite probable. And that very boldness, I see, already deludes you."

The Government detective looked at Simons in mute surprise.

At that juncture another party entered the office.

It was Madeline, in her effectual disguise as Marc Ludley. She appeared to be in a great hurry.

"Can I have a word privately with you, Mr. Simons?"

"Certainly. Step this way. Gentlemen, excuse me for a few minutes, please."

When they had entered the rear room, Ludley (as we had best speak of Madeline in her disguise) drew from his pocket a sealed letter.

"I did not break it open to get a copy; there were no conveniences for adroitly resealing it. It will be difficult for me to repeat this. The doctor, during his call this morning, said Mr. Daymon might sit up in his parlor if he would promise not to move around or excite his wound in any way. The bell-servant brings everything to the door. I do not deem it advisable to try her with a bribe; she is *o.e.* to mouth everything—"

Simons interrupted. He had coolly torn open the missive and read it, saying, at its conclusion:

"We do not need to worry about that now. This letter happens to put me on the very trail I seek. Quite a stroke of fortune at our first meeting. Read it."

The letter contained this:

"Come to the dining saloon on 'F,' between 9th and 10th streets, to-day (Thursday) at 3:30 P. M. In a few hours I will become a millionaire in good money—proceeds from sale of 'queer.' It is my intention to get out of the country with my wealth as quickly as possible. It may be our last meeting for many years to come—perhaps forever. I move about in various disguises of late, as you may reasonably infer. So that you may know me, I will wear a sprig of yellow *immortelle* in my button-hole. Hope you will prosper as I have. Bob."

Simons slipped the letter into his pocket.

"What does it mean?" Ludley asked.

"Simply that I have good reason for suspecting that Henry Daymon is in close league with a gang of counterfeiters."

"Is it possible?"

"Your duty now is to see that, in case he scents danger, he does not get away without my having full information of his movements."

"Depend on me. And now I have something to tell you."

"What is it?"

"Henry Daymon is not the man who married and deserted my sister Coralie."

"Ah! I thought so from the first. But how did you ascertain the fact?"

"Coralie told me that her recreant husband had on his arm, above the elbow, a blue anchor pricked in India ink. You know that such a mark would be indelible. In my attendance upon Henry Daymon I have seen his bare arms—both—more than once. There is no such mark on either."

"Well, hasten back to him. Oh!" with a sudden remembrance, "you will find the papers full of a sensation this afternoon, concerning Cecilia Allsworth. Keep the papers away from Daymon; caution whoever goes into his room of the relations that existed between him and Miss Allsworth—any excitement might produce a dangerous fever in his present condition."

"What is there about Miss Allsworth?"

"I have not the time now to go into particulars. But no matter what you read or hear regarding her, do not betray it to Daymon. I will see you again. I shall soon need you in an important service."

When Marc Ludley withdrew Jack returned to the two who awaited him in the outer office of the agency.

"Alex.," he said, "if you will come with me this afternoon, I think I can put you squarely on the track of the gang that is now shoving those twenties—indeed, I feel sure I can."

"Seems to me you are a remarkable fellow."

"Not at all. It is only a blind stumble. Look over that."

He handed a letter to the Government detective which read thus:

"Now is your time if ever. \$2,000 brings you into partnership—and after services, of course. Half a million ready in each, Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, and Columbus. Notes are perfect beauties—XX in particular. Impossible to detect them. Let me hear from you instanter. I do not want you to miss such a glorious opportunity for wealth."

There was neither address nor signature to the sheet of paper.

"I came across that in a package of letters in a certain gentleman's desk," Simons said, by way of explanation. "Until to-day I was unable to decide whether it was written by him or to him; as you will notice, it appears to be more in the shape of a duplicate memorandum, not having address or signature. But this morning I compared the letter with letters in the copying book at that same gentleman's office. The chirography was sufficiently similar to warrant the inference that he wrote what you have read, intending to send it to some one."

Now within the last ten minutes I have received information that will enable me to spot another of the gang. Read that"—showing the letter Madeline had brought to him.

"Observe that the handwriting of the two letters is positively the same. Therefore, gentleman No. 1 did not write but received the first letter, and at all events is on an intimacy with the gang—perhaps has entered into partnership, as urged. This I infer by the words closing the last communication: 'Hope you will prosper as I have.' It no doubt means the task of shoving the queer by gentleman No. 1, who, I happen to know, is possessed of considerable cash. Meet me here at three this afternoon, Alex., and I will point out to you one of your men, and give you name and address of the other. You will know what you want to do next. For myself, I am glad to turn this thing over in toto. I am busy up to my ears in another direction, and can't join the chase just at present."

"If I nab 'em, though, you will get your share of the praise, depend."

"Who was that young fellow just in here?" Lyon queried.

"D'nt you know?"

"How should I?"

"That is Miss Damer."

"The deuce! She makes up first rate. Wouldn't have known her."

"Well," said Alex. Allison, "I will call punctually at three."

"You will find me here," returned Simons.

The Government detective left the agency in high elation. Jack's fortunate knowledge and revelation were wonderfully timely.

CHAPTER XX.

CORALIE IS MISSING.

SIMONS by this time experienced the cravings of the inner man, and sought a near restaurant to procure his breakfast.

It was nearly noon when he started for the Allsworth mansion.

To his surprise he met there, just ascending the steps, his chief, Lyon.

"Hello! what brings you here?"

"Don't know myself," answered Lyon. "Allsworth sent a summons for me personally. By the by, there was an A. D. Telegraph lad came in to see you inside of a minute after you left—a little bit of a fellow, grasshopper high. Said he had some information for you."

Jack exclaimed inwardly:

"Can it be that the boy has so quickly earned his ten-dollar bill? I must hunt him up, then, as soon as possible."

But Simons erred in his supposition that the messenger lad wanted to see him concerning the man Jacques. Tip wished to inform the detective of a suspicious scene he had witnessed on the night previous after the delivery of the dispatch to John Smedley, Esq.

The two detectives entered the house over which rested the shadow of death—Lyon looking in blank surprise at the symbolic *crêpe* draping voluminously from the bell-knob.

John Allsworth received them in a small side-parlor. His first words were to Lyon:

"I sent for you particularly, Mr. Lyon, to tell you that I have had a glimpse of my wife—the woman who so heartlessly deserted me and her children nine years ago. As I engaged you in my trouble then I want your personal service now."

"Very well, sir. What is it I am to do?"

"You will recall my telling you that she wrote, three months after her wicked flight, saying that she had given birth to a child."

"Yes, I remember."

"I want you to find and follow her, ascertain the whereabouts of the child—boy or girl, whichever it may be—and bring it to me. I here renew my offer to you of \$5,000 to get possession of it."

Lyon was an honorable man. But it was the excusable rule of his profession that he did not

deem it advisable to inform Allsworth how nearly in his grasp he already felt the coveted child to be after what he had heard from Simons.

It is not always judicious to reveal how easily sometimes money is made.

And there is not probably any city in America where money is gained or lost with such comparative absence of effort as in Washington; yet to tell a person there that he has earned a sum easily is almost to insult him. The veriest lounger about the street corners "looking for a man," who succeeds in borrowing five dollars from a tender-natured acquaintance, considers that he has executed a hard day's work in a genteel way.

"What is your wife's appearance now, Mr. Allsworth, as compared with nine years ago?"

"There are some changes. Her hair, once of blonde color, is now jetty black, as if dyed. She has gained greatly in flesh. You still have her photograph which I gave you?"

"Yes, I have it. When did you see her?"

"Within this hour. She was riding past the house in a private coach. I judge she must have her own livery."

"Have you any idea of where she may be living?"

"Not the slightest."

"You say her appearance was as if she was living on a fashionable scale?"

"Yes."

"Then it will not be difficult to find her if her residence is at all permanent; there are only certain places to look for her. I will attend to your wishes in the matter without delay."

This being settled, Lyon inquired:

"Mr. Allsworth, what has happened? There is an atmosphere of death about the house—*crêpe* on the door?"

Allsworth's face grew strangely ghastly. He seemed to struggle for breath.

"My daughter—Cecilia."

"She is not dead!" astoundedly.

"Yes. Mr. Simons, you explain, please. I can not."

Jack related the exciting occurrences at the mansion on the past night, concluding with the remarkable death of Cecilia.

The young detective seemed to be premonished of Allsworth's bereavement.

"The undertakers are now with my child," said the grieving father, brokenly. "Doctor Dalright, our family physician, pronounces it a case of heart disease, death ensuing from sheer fright."

"Mr. Allsworth has given me charge of the matter—the firm of Lyon & Gatch, I should say," was Simon's anticipating remark, as a business inquiry was forming on the lips of his chief.

"It is a marvelous case!" commented Lyon.

"Have you any clews?"

"Yes; I happen to have caught an important clew, and expect to unravel the whole mystery, with the arrest of the criminal or criminals."

Lyon departed shortly thereafter, leaving Simons and Allsworth together.

At the expiration of half an hour Jack came forth. But as the door closed behind him, he slipped back again into the vestibule, presently emerging in his disguise as John Smedley, E. Q.

He proceeded to the apartments of Henry Daymon, whom he found sitting up, comfortably ensconced in a great cushioned chair.

Immediately upon entering he perceived that Marc Ludley, who was at his post as attendant, looked pale, worried, nervous.

"Something strange has happened," he whispered in Simons' ear. "As soon as you can, let me have a talk with you alone."

The detective shook hands with Daymon.

"I suppose you think I am unpardonably tardy, Mr. Daymon. But it was unavoidable, indeed."

"Never mind apologies, now that you have come. You must realize somewhat, however, how great is my anxiety over this matter of last night's robbery. Mr. Ludley, will you please to leave us alone?"

When Marc withdrew, he continued:

"I shall begin where I left off. The article stolen from me was a bracelet. It was of solid gold, broad and heavy, its edges enameled with a line of black. It was profusely chased; there were mountings for four diamonds. One of the diamonds was missing. I knew the bracelet belonged to Miss Allsworth, for she had shown it to me as part of a magnificent set of jewels presented to her recently by an aunt living in Pennsylvania. Tuesday evening last I visited Miss Allsworth, who is, I have told you, my affianced bride. It was about half-past ten when I left the house. As I walked along by the garden wall, I observed that the gate was slightly ajar. Instantly suspecting something wrong, and feeling privileged by my intimacy with the family, I entered the garden for investigation. Presently I discovered two forms skulking in the high bush shadows. I sprung forward. The two separated. One I pursued. This figure acted in a remarkable manner, going by great bounds, at times upright, then again on all-fours, crawling with lightning quickness through the dense, prickly rose-bushes in his endeavor to elude me. During my pursuit, I

could hear the other party, somewhere concealed in the shadows, guardedly calling: 'Lepo! Lepo!'

"At last I was within a stride of the fleeing and singular-gaited fellow. Just as my hand reached out to grasp him, I was attracted by something brilliant that be let fall. In the moment that I stooped to pick up this object, the fugitive utterly disappeared; though I searched the garden thoroughly, I could find no trace of the intruders. What I found there was the bracelet I mention. I at once recognized it as Miss Allsworth's. But for my lucky presence, the robbers would have secured it. I intended returning it to her, with the explanation, last evening, when I met with this mishap. I have told you all there is to tell. Now, what, think you, are the prospects of my recovering the bracelet?"

"The prospects are fairer than would appear from the scant information you have given me."

The detective's eyes were glistening. He had gathered a wondrously important link from Daymon's recital.

"I am encouraged by that reply, Mr. Smedley; but I can't see how."

"Leave everything to me. I am confident I can soon restore the bracelet to you. And now I must bid you good-day. I have some pressing duties. Be hopeful. I will see you again—"

"But about the other matter of which I spoke?"

"What was that?"

"Miss Allsworth's singular behavior toward me."

"Oh—well, Mr. Daymon, I must decline to meddle there. It is a delicate matter; better if investigated by yourself alone."

"Perhaps you are right," sighed Daymon.

Jack Simons left the room, meeting outside the door Marc Ludley, who awaited him with signs of impatience.

"There is another mystery," Marc said, in an undertone.

"What about?"

"My sister."

"What of her?"

"Coralie is missing!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A BIG SENSATION.

THE detective echoed Marc Ludley's words. "Coralie is missing! How do you mean? Explain."

"When I left your office I went to my sister's rooms to apprise her of my having given up the position of governess to Amy Allsworth, and partially explain my masquerade in male attire. The landlady had not seen Coralie since her return from the Treasury yesterday afternoon. On a table I found this note."

She opened and handed a note to Simons. It was the same we have seen Mr. Bob write at the dictation of Buck Gosh, in the underground den of counterfeiters.

"Well, I do not see anything remarkable about this," Simons said, after reading what purported to be a hurried notification of departure.

"You don't?"

"Why, no."

"I do. That writing is no more like my sister's than yours would be."

"What are your suspicions?"

"There has been foul play."

"By whom?"

"That is the riddle. But I believe my sister has been made off with."

"What shall you do?"

"Do? We must find her! I want your ablest help. You are experienced—I am not."

"But, suppose you are wrong in your idea?"

"Such a supposition may endanger Coralie's life."

"True. I will go to work on it. I have an engagement this afternoon which cannot be broken. After that I will see what I can sift regarding Miss Coralie. Where is her place of residence?"

Marc gave the address.

Before they separated Simons said:

"To-morrow midnight I want you to be at the agency. I shall require your assistance in a matter testing nerve and circumspection. No one will answer but you. Do not fail to come."

With this mysterious speech he left the house.

By the time he reached the agency the cries of newsboys were ringing on the streets—not usual cries, but of a tenor that caused pedestrians to pause, listen, while the papers were selling with a rush.

The words of these cries were:

"Crit-ic! First edition! Full account of the robbery and murder! Bloody death of a s'ity belle!"

Buying a paper, Simons entered the office. To his surprise he found there Tip, the telegraph-boy, curled up on the lounge, asleep and snoring.

"Said he'd been up all night and would bunk there till you came in, if I had no objections, as he must see you about something urgent," explained the agency clerk.

"Very well. Let him get his sleep out."

Simons then seated himself to read the following account, set with blazing head-lines, in the center column, first page of the paper:

THE WOLVES OF WASHINGTON!

A DARING BURGLARY!

\$50,000 IN DIAMONDS GONE!

A Beautiful Young Lady in the Grasp of an Assassin Thief!

[Special Report.]

"Shortly before midnight of last night, while the population of Washington reposed in peaceful unconsciousness, there was being perpetrated in their midst a bold and successful robbery, accompanied by violence, that may well cause a thrill of horror to pervade the breasts of our citizens. Of thieves there are plenty round us, and it is creditable that the authorities are strenuous in their endeavors to root out the evil of such a presence; but when the deeds of

SPOILS AND BLOOD

assume the shudderful aspect of last night's work it is time the people rose in righteous wrath to hunt the red-souled wretches to their barbarous lairs. The scene of the crime was the residence of Mr. John Allsworth, No. — Massachusetts avenue. He is a gentleman of wealth and refinement, well known in the best circles of our community; a widower with two daughters, Misses Amy and Cecilia, the first of whom is in her eleventh year. Miss Cecilia Allsworth was soon to have been married. In prospect of the wedding, a relative had forwarded to Miss Allsworth, as an affectionate gift, a magnificent case of jewels

VALUED AT \$50,000.

"By some means the city thugs learned of the existence of these jewels, and that they had not yet been deposited in a safety vault, and forthwith the burglary was planned. On the night of Tuesday last the jewels disappeared in a manner of deepest mystery. The keenest of our detectives, who immediately and silently went to work, confessed themselves at fault for a clew. But not yet satisfied, the thieves hazarded that there might be more booty where they had found the first. Last night, upon retiring, Miss Allsworth fairly surprised

A BURGLAR IN HER BEDROOM

in the act of rummaging for further plunder. Before she could give the alarm she was assaulted with brutal ferocity, her arms and neck being torn and bruised as if by a demon's claws, while terrible blows were dealt upon her head. Those who were in the house heard a shriek of agony proceeding from her apartment, and made all haste thither, only to find the young lady lying prostrate, bleeding and lifeless. Bed curtains torn, furniture knocked about, the gilt-papered walls and carpeting splattered and stained with blood—all bore evidence that there had been a

DESPERATE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

"Detectives were instantly summoned and the authorities afterward notified. A water spout, close to the window, on which were smears of blood—besides the bloody imprint of a man's hand on the sill—indicate plainly the dangerous but determined mode of ascent to the room. Doctor Jason Dalgarn, the family physician, was promptly called in, but his services were useless, the young lady being then dead. Miss Allsworth's wounds were not such as to have proved fatal in themselves; but she has inherited and suffered more or less from an ailment of the heart, and her death may be attributed to sheer fright under the terrible circumstances.

THE VICTIM OF THIS OUTRAGE

was a young, beautiful and greatly esteemed lady, whose sad fate must be deeply mourned. Early in the coming year, she was to have been the bride of a rich and worthy gentleman engaged in business in this city. It was only last winter that she appeared for the first time in society.

"The very best of detective skill has been employed, and it is hoped that the assassin-plunderer cannot long escape the just retribution of the law.

"The funeral of Miss Allsworth takes place tomorrow (Friday) at 3 P. M. The interment will be at Oak Hill."

CHAPTER XXII.

A WASHINGTON SHARK.

WHILE the whole community was aghast at the startling intelligence contained in that one evening paper, there were certain ones upon whom it crashed with a peculiarly stunning effect.

Mrs. Cornish, sitting in her elegant boudoir, read the account with distended eyes and face of a deathly hue. For a space it seemed as if she would have fainted; and in a tearless misery she gasped:

"Oh God! My child—my own child has been murdered! And I not at her side—outcast, exiled, not daring to go near her! How can I bear it?"

Monsieur Derdier, the French secretary of Mrs. Cornish's affairs, devoured the news with livid face and fearfully scintillating eyes.

"Sacre bleu!" he snarled, under his serpentine mustache. "It is my Lepo! He have murdair ze young lady. Diable! Here will be ze trouble terrific. Ze fat is in ze fire. I must s'all kill ze Lepo immediate and clear myself out!"

Lyn Cornish entered the Frenchman's room, carrying, crunched in his hand, a copy of the paper.

"Monsieur Derdier, what have you to say to this?" shaking the paper forward.

"Ah, Monsieur Lyn! I am in ze devil predicament," he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders high.

"Then this is the doing of your accursed chimpanzee?"

"Why I s'all deny it? Ze villainous Lepo! You know he escape me last night. Well, he go to ze house and do zis—"

"You and he also stole the jewels!"

"Oui, monsieur; but I never have think of harm to ze young lady herself. Lepo go ze second time hees—what you say?—hees own hook. Ze villain!"

"Do you realize our pressing danger?"

"Vraiment! Lepo must s'all be kill, now. We have to leave ze city Washington and live economic when we have him no more. Ah, monsieur! you think not so far as I. Ze paper say ze wound would not make ze deat'. Ha! What if ze young lady, before she have die outright, make known ze kind of burglar she have seen—eh? Ma foi! Ze papair, ze detective tell not zis. If ze Lepo he is found, we go to ze grand destruction. Diable! yes. To-night we put ze Lepo in a barrel—you and I, monsieur—and s'all a-drown him to deat' in ze Potomac!"

At the same moment this dialogue occurred, Thomas Bilspoon—with gold-headed cane tucked under his arm, gold eye-glasses adjusted on his nose, and ostentatiously using a gold tooth-pick—was standing behind the reading-room window at the National Hotel, engrossed with a paper and its sensational account of the robbery.

As he finished perusing the flaming-headed article, there was a tugging touch upon his coat-sleeve.

He turned, to be confronted by a remarkably small man with very pointed nose and chin, wearing side-whiskers, also twirled to a point, and a seal-skin cap, under the peakless rim of which were two steely-colored and sharp eyes that added to the rat-like appearance of his countenance.

"Excuse me—but I believe you are Mr. Thomas Bilspoon?"

"Yes, sir; that is my name. Don't think I know you, sir," rejoined the ex-pork-packer, pompously surveying the small man through his gold eye-glasses.

"Au! But I know you. My name is Jumbo—Sykey Jumbo."

The preposterous assumption of anything Jumbonian about this diminutive anatomy might have appeared amusing; but Bilspoon swelled and scraped his throat with additional dignity.

"Aw—hm! Well, Mr. Jumbo, I have not the pleasure of—"

"Oh, all right; I'll overlook that. I have some business with you."

"Business?" in lofty surprise.

"Yes, that's it exactly. Come into the corner here, where we can talk without being overheard."

To Bilspoon's disgust, Sykey Jumbo "hitched arms" and irresistibly led the way to a corner seat.

"I am not accustomed to any such familiarity, sir, and you will oblige—"

"Oh, don't let that worry you; it'll be all right. Sit down. Your name is Thomas Bilspoon. You are a retired pork-packer. You hail from Cincinnati. You have a bill for back dues, amounting to somewhere about \$100,000, now being audited by the Claims Committee. Am I right, or am I wrong?"

"Aw—hm! Well—a—strikes me you are pretty well informed."

"It's my business to be," said Sykey Jumbo, with a knowing nod. "Now, Mr. Bilspoon, your claim is on the verge of getting into a big pickle, sir—did you know it?"

"No. And I don't understand what you are talking about."

"The claim is about to hang fire, that's all."

"Hang fire? Impossible! Senator Slapp said to me the other day—"

"He is chairman of the committee."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, there's something crooked come to light concerning the claim, which brings it to a dangerous stand-still. Unfortunate, too; for this very morning it was to have been the first business of the hour."

"There's nothing crooked," puffed Bilspoon. "Senator Slapp said to me the other day—"

"My dear Mr. Bilspoon, that gentleman, as chairman, may carry some weight in your behalf. Slapp is a good fellow. I know him well. But he can't force a whole committee into perpetrating a fraud. The recent discoveries submitted to the committee—"

"There is no fraud; there are no discoveries to be made," interrupted the man of pork, emphatically.

"You think the bill will be reported on all right?"

"Of course—certainly, sir."

"Well, it won't be; I will bet you money on that."

"I tell you, sir, Senator Slapp said to me the other day—"

"Never mind what Senator Slapp said 'the other day.' It's what I'm going to say to-day that you had best attend to. Now just listen. The case stands this way: The committee has been reliably notified that your bill is near \$20,000 too high. They will, no doubt, notify

you of this; the bill will be laid over till next session."

"But I will present myself before the committee and—"

"My dear Bilspron, the party who would be bold enough to bring an accusation before a Congressional committee, generally has the whole investigation campaign laid out beforehand. You would be worsted even if your claim were all right. If you start to raise a row, the chances are, why, the whole claim will be disallowed. See the point?"

Bilspron began to feel slightly alarmed. Perhaps, he argued in his brain, there had been put on, in a hasty moment, a few thousands more than his contract would have permitted even if loosely awarded. Had he failed to fee somebody at the date of issue of contract? Had this somebody, now become a sharp enemy, discovered an overcharge and determined upon either a process of "bleeding" or exposure? These were thoughts warning of the necessity of circumspection.

"Aw—hm! What is it you wished more particularly to say to me?" he asked, sidling a little closer to the rat-faced Sykey Jumbo.

"Now you are talking business. The way things stand, you may lose your bill entirely, or wait a year for it. Let me see; there would be \$6,000 interest. But then, worse, you will anyhow lose \$20,000. Let me tell you, I know all about these committees; I can turn them round my thumb. I can arrange the matter for you so that the claim, as it stands, will go through like a charm."

"This will take money."

"Oh, yes."

"About how much would you deem a proper figure for—a—that is—"

"I will be liberal. I will save for you \$10,000. I will guarantee to engineer your claim through for \$100,000, provided you pay me now in advance \$5,000, and \$5,000 more when the favorable report goes in—as it surely will."

"Aw—hm! yes. Well, Mr. Jumbo, do you know what I think of you?"

"What, my dear sir?"

"You are a fraud!"

"Oh, am I? You decline to deal, then?"

"Yes, sir. I'll see you hanged first. Get out, sir. Ten thousand dollars! I have a notion to procure your arrest on the charge of attempting blackmail. Get out!"

Rising abruptly the ex-pork-packer strutted pompously away.

Sykey Jumbo did not appear to be the least disconcerted. With a composed smile he sauntered leisurely from the hotel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PAYING FOR MACHINE OIL.

NEVERTHELESS, Thomas Bilspron was uneasy in his mind.

The trite adage, "where there is smoke, there is fire," had the effect of rendering Sykey Jumbo's recent assertions unpalatably preying.

He purchased paper, envelope and stamp, and wrote a hasty communication to Honorable — Slapp; then concluding that the mail would not be rapid enough, he procured a messenger and sent him running down to the Capitol, over which waved a flag indicating that the Senate had not yet adjourned.

At about dusk a special messenger from the Capitol entered the hotel and inquired for Thomas Bilspron, Esq.

Being shown to that gentleman's room, he presented a letter and withdrew—a letter containing another letter.

Bilspron read, stared: then he puffed and interjected in astoundment, pacing his floor excitedly.

One letter was like this:

"MY DEAR BILSPRON:—In reply, I inclose copy of a letter that was laid before the Claims Committee this morning, at the very moment when we were about to pass upon your bill. Now, much as I am inclined to favor a constituent—and a personal friend at that—you will admit my helplessness in whatever action the committee takes upon the letter. I cannot jeopardize myself by evincing any extraordinary interest in your behalf. Yours,

— SLAPP."

The inclosure was like this:

"[COPY.]

"CINCINNATI, Nov. —, 18—

"To the Honorable — Slapp, Chairman, and Gentleman of Claims Committee:

"You have before you, for consideration, a bill for back dues in favor of one Thomas Bilspron, of Cincinnati, for Marine rations. The account represents a sum of about \$100,000—whereas the subscriber has in his possession sufficient data and figures to prove an overcharge upon the Commissary—at that time Gen. — Potley—of nearly \$20,000. In justice to the Government, it is therefore respectfully asked that action be delayed upon bill for said contract, until the proofs are laid before your honorable body, by me, personally."

"Very resp'y, your ob't servant,

DARIUS POZZLEWIGHT."

"Curse Darius Pozzleight!" burst, in very undignified accents, from dignified Thomas Bilspron, as he ranted to and fro, the two letters, crushed one in each hand, waving about tragically.

"But this looks serious," he meditated, aloud.

and pausing to scan the letters again. "Perhaps I was too hasty with Mr. Jumbo—as he calls himself. Now, if he really can manage it so that I can beat this foul vagabond, Darius Pozzleight—if he can, as he avows, arrange the thing to work smoothly—by blazes! it is better to pay him what he asks, and get my \$90,000, than to lose \$20,000, or perhaps all, or have the bill laid over till next session, when I might be turning \$5,000 or more in interest. I must wipe out this Pozzleight—curse him! To do that, I must buy up Jumbo. Like his elephantine namesake, he costs money. But, no matter. Aw—hm!"

And again, as he seated himself to fill out a check, he gnashed:

"Curse Darius Pozzleight!"

Back to the reading-room he went. The party he sought was not there. But Jumbo was at a premium now. He left the National and hastened to the Metropolitan, in the square above.

Fortunate impulse! There was Sykey Jumbo at the news stand, purchasing a cigar.

"Mr. Jumbo," he said, approaching confidentially.

"Ob, hello! How are you, Bilspron? How are claims?" and the rat-faced Sykey nonchalantly exhaled a cloud of smoke around the shoulders of the man of pork.

"Step aside with me, Mr. Jumbo. I—aw—hm!—I would like to talk that little matter over further."

Entering the room where the window opened on the elevator engine, Bilspron said, in a stagey whisper:

"You must remember, sir, you are a perfect stranger to me."

"Oh, that doesn't matter in business, you know."

"Now, if I should give you this money—"

"If you give me the money, your claim will be all right in a jiffy. If you do not—with a finger snap and nod—"that ends it."

"What guarantee have I that you—aw—hm!—that you are not a mere sharper who will make off with the first \$5,000?"

"That's easy. Date the check ahead three days. I will have to deposit it for collection. Before three days the claim will have gone through, or you may shoot me on sight. There is no risk."

"Here, then."

The check passed—Bilspron first stepping to a desk and dating it three days ahead. Sykey Jumbo assumed an air of extreme gravity.

"You have done a wise thing, Mr. Bilspron. Your head's level. Now I must begin to work that committee this very night, and so shall have to leave you. Have the other check ready. Shouldn't wonder if you got your order on the United States Treasurer to-morrow."

"So soon as that?"

"Oh, we do things with a rush when we have this to work with," tapping significantly on the pocket where the check was stowed.

Sykey Jumbo departed with the hurry of a man on urgent business bent.

At the reservation, corner of Seventh street, he called a huck and was whirled away to the Ebbitt House. Idly loitering there, he met a gentleman with whom he evidently had an appointment.

It was Lyn Cornish.

"Well, Harry?" Lyn said, inquiringly, addressing Jumbo by what appeared to be his proper name.

"Oh, it's all right."

"Did Porkey bite?"

"Yes. Got the check in my pocket."

"Good. Now I must hurry and consult with Mrs. Cornish. There's a lot of favorably-reported bills going into the Senate to-morrow, and we must get Bilspron's along with the rest. Have you thoroughly instructed your twin brother what he is to do? I will make up the game at the Treasury."

"Yes, Dick's all right. He'll bleed Porkey for the other ten thousand before he gets through with him."

"The whole thing works admirably. I wonder I never thought before of making my piles this way. Let us take something."

"Don't care if I do."

They entered the handsome hotel bar-room and drank a smiling health to "Porkey Bilspron."

It was rather a remarkable transaction between Bilspron and Jumbo, in the dim reading-room of the Metropolitan. But the ladders to "rings" in Washington, while very steep, differ in sheer venturesomeness from the ilk elsewhere, and many a roundel has to be wrapped with "big" money as the candidate for admission ascends.

Bilspron felt buoyant of spirit. He was somehow inspired by an exhilarating confidence in the mysterious Sykey Jumbo—the individual who could turn committees round his thumb.

Returning to his room at the National, he prepared his toilet with much elaboration. An important engagement was to be kept. He counted the contents of his pocketbook with a grunt of satisfaction.

It was fully dark when he issued forth upon

the street—a cold night, too, in which the myriad lights around him, and the countless stars above him, shone with frosty brilliancy.

The destination was the liquor saloon of Buck Gosh.

He gayly anticipated soon being in the presence of Coralie, who was by this time—he had no doubt—safely meshed, in his power, his helpless victim.

"She shall marry me instantly," he flattered himself; "or—aw-hm!—well, she will wish she had, that's all."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WOLF AND HIS PREY.

BUCK GOSH was in expectation of the coming of his wealthy patron.

No time was lost in entering the sanded side-room, where Bilspron, without seating himself, or even pausing to indulge in his favorite potion of brandy and water, at once interrogated:

"The girl? Aw-hm! What about the girl, Buck?"

"Why, when I starts out to anythink, I don't gen'rally make a botch of it, bossy," was the beery-faced ruffian's response.

"Then you have caught the prize for me?"

"Safe enough, you can gamble."

"There can be no doubt about it?"

"Well, I'd snicker. No, I've got her—square in-jun."

Forthwith Bilspron produced his pocket-book and counted out several crisp greenbacks.

"There's the other five hundred, Buck. You see I keep my engagements with those who keep to me."

"Oh, you're square, that's sure."

"Now, where is the—a—aw-hm!—the sweet charmer?"

"You're right about 'er bein' a sweet charmer. She's as purty a gal's ever I laid peepers on. Don't blame you for wantin' to own such a bit. Come on; I've got 'er at a house close by."

They left the saloon, moving southward, presently turning a corner and halting at a house built on the "made-ground," where once was the course of the Washington canal.

Into this house they were admitted by the woman called Daisy, whom we have seen in conference with Buck Gosh before.

"Come in, quick," urged this bedizened female, waving a lamp above her head, and in apparent haste to have the door shut.

As they entered, Buck slipped some money into her palm, whispering:

"There's half, Daisy; you'll get the rest when the racket's over with." Then aloud: "I guess I ain't no use round here, now, so I'll go back to the s'lloon. This here's a gentleman, Daisy; you treat 'im right."

When Daisy had let Buck out and carefully locked the door, she turned to Bilspron, with a sickly-leering smile:

"Come along up-stairs and I'll show you the room. You've got good taste, old man; she's a stunning pretty girl, I must say. Hope you'll be able to make it all right with her. She kind of tried the screaming dodge after she come to, when they brought her here last night, but I soon settled that. I just threatened to put a gag in her cherry-lipped mouth, so she promised to shut up and behave herself. This is the room. It's stout enough to hold her, I guess; you won't find any place for her to crawl out, you bet. Go right in."

Turning a key in the lock of a door on the second floor, she half-pushed him inside—then reclosed the door and departed.

It was hardly a room in which he found himself; rather a spacious closet at the front of the hall, without window or ventilator, except a round opening, high up beyond reach in the wall, and not of sufficient dimensions to have permitted the passage of a human body.

A carpetless, cheerless apartment, heated by a little inadequate register, its furniture consisting barely of a bed, washstand, rocking-chair, and a round, three-legged table on which burned an oil lamp.

In the rocking-chair sat Coralie!

She looked quickly up as he entered, and her lovely face, so pale, so bleak, would have melted any but a craven's heart with pity.

Into the hazel eyes leaped a hopeful light, as she cried:

"Mr. Bilspron! It is really you? You have come to rescue me from this horrid place?"

"Aw-hm! yes, my dear Miss Coralie," he answered, bowing somewhat stiffly. "I am pleased to say that I can deliver you from this—"

"Oh, I am so glad!" she broke in. "Let us go at once. The painted woman who is my jailer has threatened me with such dreadful things! It is Providence that must have led you to me in my misfortune. How kind and prompt of you! From my heart I thank you. I shall always remember it gratefully."

"Yes, but—aw-hm—wait a moment, my dear Miss Coralie."

"Oh, no! let us not delay an instant, Mr. Bilspron. You do not know—I have been cruelly abducted from my home. There are those who will worry greatly at my strange absence. My only thought is to return. I am careless even whether the rough wretches who have done me this wrong are punished or not, if I only get safely away from here. Do let us hasten."

The pompous man of pork seated himself on the edge of the low bedstead.

"Stop a bit, Miss Coralie. I have something to say, first. It rests altogether with yourself whether you go away from this place or remain."

"How do you mean?" in surprise.

"You are aware that I love you—"

She raised a hand to stop him, but he pursued:

"I am a rich man, and my wife can live elegantly. I want you to marry me."

"Mr. Bilspron, do not repeat your former proposition—please do not. I assure you I could not marry you if I would."

"Nonsense, my dear. Come, you may judge that mine is no common passion, to be cooled in a day, when you consider all the trouble I have incurred—expense and danger, too—to possess you. It must be obvious that I am determined to make you mine."

Now—aw-hm!—In all calmness, I must inform you that you can only leave here as my wife."

She stood before him, shocked, speechless. The old villain surveyed her grimly, even relaxing his dignified lips into a coarse smile.

Like a flash she comprehended all.

"Wretch!" she gasped at last. "It is you, then, who have done this outrage!"

"There is no outrage—except that you are outrageously foolish to refuse the magnificent offer of marriage—"

The very scorn in her curved lip partially checked him.

"You will find you have made a mistake, Mr. Bilspron."

"You are quite in my power, my dear."

"Perhaps not as much so as you think. Heaven has many ways for succoring a helpless girl."

"Nevertheless, you will have to marry me."

"I tell you it would be impossible."

"Come, I may as well be plain. If you continue obstinate, it is my intention to drug you so that even the minister who performs the ceremony will not suspect that you are otherwise than a willing bride. Think it over a little, my dear. You cannot escape."

There was a horror in this threat that nearly froze the blood in her veins.

"Merciful Heaven! you know not what you would do!" she cried.

"I think my statement was comprehensive; and if you persist, I mean it—I mean every bit of it. My wife you must and shall be."

"But you do not know—" she panted, hesitating.

"I know that you are to be Mrs. Thomas Bilspron, by fair means or foul," he retorted, becoming a little excited. "You are in my power. Do not anger me, or I may change my mind about the honorable offer, and the day will come when you will beg me to marry you!"

"Thomas Bilspron, I am already a married woman, and my husband is living, is here in Washington!"

The words were cried frantically from her lips, and a look of torturous fear settled in her white face.

For a second his jaw dropped in amazement. Then he chuckled aloud, eying her with a cunning leer.

"Oh, come, now, I can't stand any nonsense like that. A cute trick, my dear—very cute. But it won't work. I am not so easily fooled."

"It is the truth. Believe me—it is the truth. I was married in Richmond more than three years ago; my husband's name is Robert Daymon."

"But I do not believe a word of it."

"Heaven is my witness, I speak truly. Oh, do not commit this terrible sin you have threatened!"

For a moment he gazed at her with a puzzled expression. Then, without another word, he abruptly arose and quitted the room.

To his slight surprise, Daisy was near by in the hallway. He frowned with the suspicion that she had been listening to what passed. But what mattered it if she had?

"I believe my friend, Mr. Gosh, called you Daisy?" he said.

"Yes, that's the name I go by."

"Now—aw-hm!—Daisy, we will have to drug the girl, it is plain. I begin to suspect something that never struck me before."

"What is it?"

"She is a little demented. Strategy is required. I have heard that these charlatan fortune-tellers, clairvoyants and such, about all towns, are notorious for drugs that you can buy of them—love-powders and the like. Cannot you—"

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed the creature, with a sly wink. "I know the very place to get what you want. Give me a XX and I'll soon fix your girl for you."

He handed out a twenty-dollar note.

"Very good. There is the amount. I shall call again to-morrow night, bringing a clergyman with me. I depend on you, now, to have the girl in a state of mind fully prepared for the ceremony."

"Make yourself easy. I'll have her ready enough for you."

Daisy let the wealthy schemer out at the front door. There was a strange glitter in her Saturn-bright eyes which Bilspron did not observe.

CHAPTER XXV.

RAIDED BY THE POLICE.

PAUSING long enough to assure herself that Thomas Bilspron was gone, Daisy hastily ascended the stairs to Coralie's prison-room.

There was the light of a peculiar purpose in her dull-shiny eyes as she went, and her penciled brows contracted in mental study.

The captive was again seated in the rocking-chair, her face bowed to her hands. Utterly dejected she looked, utterly hopeless she felt. Her position, with the craven Bilspron's threat overshadowing her, was one to terrify the inmost soul of any pure woman; it was too monstrous, yet compelling shudderful contemplation.

So stupefying was the impression of the recent interview that she scarcely noticed Daisy's entrance.

Daisy stood gazing at her for a brief space in silence. Her features worked in an enigmal mixing of emotions at first resentful, then softened in the influence of some inner secret, while her voluptuous bosom heaved as though a struggle waged fiercely there.

"I say, miss?"

Coralie glanced up apathetically.

"I've something to say to you," Daisy continued. The unhappy captive shivered. She feared this woman who—as she informed Bilspron—had threatened her heartlessly in the event of any outcries or attempts to escape.

"I heard you say, miss, that you were married."

"And so I am—so I am!" answered Coralie, chokingly.

Daisy had been a listener to Bilspron's interview with his prey.

"You were married, over three years ago, to a man named Robert Daymon?"

"It is true, indeed it is."

"You're the girl I've heard him say he ran away from, then, are you—"

"You heard him say—"

"Answer my question, please."

"My husband deserted me. He tried to make me believe that I was not lawfully his wife, but I have since obtained all necessary proofs that the marriage was perfectly valid."

"Have you seen him since?"

"Yes, several times, though he did not suspect it. He has changed his name to Henry Daymon."

"Henry Daymon?" repeated Daisy, looking puzzled. "I guess you must be mistaken, miss. He doesn't use any name but his own, that I know of—and I ought to know—and that's Robert; Mr. Bob, he's called."

"You seem to know the man who is my husband."

"Well, I'd smile pretty loud if I didn't. But tell me: do you love him—Bob—any more? I want to know."

A fire of intense scorn asserted itself in the young girl's heart.

"Love him? Love the man who would so ruthlessly have wrecked my life?—who would, without mercy, have subjected me to the world's abhorrence? No—I despise, I loathe him!"

"I am glad to hear you say that," exclaimed Daisy, taking a step forward.

"Why are you glad?"

"Because I do love Bob, and we couldn't both have him, you know."

A shrinking repugnance crept over Coralie at this bold declaration.

"But do you realize your sin? You have no right—"

"Oh, bother the right. I love Bob and Bob loves me, and that settles it. You are sure you have given him up?"

"Yes. I wish never to so much as exchange words with him. He has gone out of my life as utterly as some crawling, polluting snake. But—" in a sudden vehemence, and supplication—"oh, listen to me! I am his wife still in the face of the law. This monster who has just left me, contemplates an awful crime toward me. Save me from him, I beseech you. Let me go away from here. If you will only let me go, I promise, I swear, I will not seek or aid in punishing those who dragged me here. You are a woman—you can see the enormity of my danger. Have pity, then—oh, have pity! Do not let this man have performed the shameful farce of a marriage ceremony with me. He has threatened to drug me—"

"Hold on, miss," Daisy interrupted. "Don't get excited, now. Keep cool. It's true, I've been hired to help that old rascal. But I ain't so bad all over, after all; I'm going to help you—"

Coralie, with a joyous cry, sprung forward and caught both her hands.

A strange, gentle thrill passed over Daisy as the hands of a pure woman thus grasped her own with such boundless gratefulness.

"I don't suppose Bob cares a snap for you, miss. But I know his nature well enough to know that, so long as you're his wife, if he got wind of what this old rascal is up to, he'd stick a knife into him quick as wink. I've got a hundred or so you're gray-haired admirer has already paid me, and as I don't consider it a bit of harm to go back on such as he is, why, I'm going to sell him out on this game, and then skip for Chicago. Bob's going there, and we're going to Europe pretty soon, to see the sights. So come on," she concluded, heartily. "I don't wish you anything but good. I guess you can find your way home."

Furnishing Coralie with a hat and old shawl—for she had neither of these when snatched from her home by the abductors—Daisy led the way downstairs.

"Now, miss; you just run for it," she said, throwing open the door.

"May God bless you for this deed!" said Coralie, fervently, pausing on the threshold to again press the hands of her deliverer.

"Don't stop for any thanks. Maybe I don't exactly deserve any; it's only for Bob's sake I'm doing this. Run, now."

Away went Coralie aimlessly through the night, her bounding, hopeful heart throbbing with an almost choking vigor.

To both north and south gleamed lights and reflections from populous thoroughfares, for that portion of Washington once known as "The Island" is now vast, dense and busy almost as the older portion of the capital.

She knew not where she was nor which way to turn. But she was free! She must not pause. Short as had been the period of her imprisonment, this breath of freedom acted like a precious elixir.

Turning the first corner, she sped onward, the sole object being to leave behind her the locality so dreaded.

She came presently before a saloon, having a globe light over the entrance that flared in the gusty, snow-smelling wind.

A man was just then mounting a high stool as if to adjust the flame of the light. With a palpitating heart she addressed him.

"Would you please, sir, to tell me which way Pennsylvania avenue lies from here? I fear I am lost."

If she could once gain that thoroughfare, Coralie would know her course.

The man turned to look down at her. The globe light flickered fully across her pale face.

"By thunder! the gal's broke loose!" he blurted.

Before Coralie could realize his movement, he had leaped upon her with a ruffian grip. One brawny, bared arm encircled her waist; one dirty palm clapped tight over her mouth, effectually checking the shriek that would have burst from her lips.

Overcome by fright, in her excited frame of mind, she fainted in the polluting embrace of Buck Gosh, who carried her, with a rush, into his saloon and back to the sanded side-room.

There chanced to be no loungers in the bar at the moment.

"Here's a purty gal!" he growled, with an oath.

"What 'n thunder's Daisy thinkin' about, lettin' the gal slip 'er holt this way?"

Closing the door of the side-room he placed her in a chair, pushed the chair against the wall, that her head might have support, then shuffled briskly to the bar for a pitcher of water.

But the water was not needed. Coralie's recovery was sudden.

She started to her feet, bewildered and dizzy. At the same instant the secret panel slid aside and Mr. Bob stepped into the room, coming from the counterfeiter's den underground.

"Coralie!" he cried, in astonishment.

"Robert Daymon!"

Husband and wife stood face to face.

Whatever might have further passed between these two, it was interrupted in a startling manner.

The door was wrenched open jarringly and Daisy came bounding in among them, almost breathless with excitement.

"Get out, all of you, double-quick!" she cried.

"Warn the gang! The jig's up! The cops have tumbled to the racket in the cellar, and they may be close behind me now!"

But Daisy's warning was too late.

There was a heavy, swift tramp of many feet; before Mr. Bob could withdraw behind the secret panel six men crowded sternly into the room, all carrying cocked revolvers, and on the breasts of four gleamed the badge-plates of the Metropolitan Police.

Daisy wrung her hands, wailing aloud:

"Ah! Buck, didn't I tell you you'd wish you'd got out of this ranch while you had time?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

OVERHAULING THE COUNTERFEITERS.

CORALIE had scarcely left the steps of the house from which she had been so providentially delivered, when two forms approached rapidly through the cloudy gloom, coming from an opposite direction.

They were a man and a boy. Halting before the house, the man ascended the steps and tried the door-handle in a way of authority.

"You are sure, now, Tip," spoke the familiar voice of Jack Simons, "that this is the house you followed the mysterious track to last night?"

"Certain sure; yes, sir. I nigh run my legs off keeping up with it, for I tell you, that they just let out lively after I saw 'em coming from the alley carrying the dead-like figure. Yes, this is the house, sure."

Daisy had not yet withdrawn from the door when these words passed. She stood looking at one of her hands, the other holding the light.

"And she wasn't afraid to take me by the hand!" she muttered, with emotion; "that pure and pretty girl. How her touch felt! Ah! it has been a long, long time since a true woman's hand was laid in mine, until this night. I feel sort of queer yet over it. She asked God's blessing on me, too! I guess God has given me up, long ago. But, somehow, I feel a thrilling pleasure that I went back on the old rascal, and let her skip out—Hal who can that be coming?"

She bent to listen as voices sounded on the steps outside. She could distinctly overhear the voices of Simons and Tip.

"They are on the girl's track already! Wasn't it a lucky move that I let her go—and none too soon!"

As the detective and the telegraph-boy paused on the steps, a party of men suddenly appeared, marching, with evident stealth, in a drilled file past the house.

The scudding snow-clouds just then moved aside from the face of the moon, and Simons recognized Alex. Allison, the Government detective, leading the men, who were uniformed police.

"Hello, Allison!" he called, guardedly.

"Simons!—that you?"

Allison halted his companions.

"What's up with you here, Jack?"

"I might put the same question."

"Oh, the answer is simple. I shadowed the man we spotted at the eating saloon this afternoon—the fellow with the yellow immortelle *boutonnière*, you know. It led me to the saloon of a man named Buck Gosh, around the corner yonder. I 'made-up' incog., entered the place, played drunk with the rest whom I found there. I observed that several men entered a side-room, and didn't come out even at full dark. Under a drunken pretense—for which the landlord gave me a jolly cussing—I reeled into the room and found it empty. The mysterious part was, that this room had no other visible means of egress. It stands to reason there must be a secret rendezvous of some kind there; and on the strength of our mutual suspicions I am going to raid the place. Come along with us. There may be stern work ahead."

"And I am here to rescue a young lady who has been abducted," said Simons. "This bright boy with me was an accidental witness to the outrage, and traced the track that carried her off to this house. It doesn't look to me as if anybody was in. I tried the door; it's fastened."

"But I am sure I saw a light through the keyhole as I came up to you," declared Allison.

Daisy,

ruffian landlord and a policeman went down with a groan of agony.

Mr. Bob sprung to the secret panel, and would have imitated Gosh in firing at the officers. But again Allison's weapon cracked. The counterfeiter, mortally wounded, reeled forward and fell, his face ghastly with blood.

Daisy uttered a hysterical shriek and threw herself upon the prostrate form of her lover, calling vainly to him in a delirium of woe.

The ball had fairly opened now, so to speak. Tramping, stumbling feet were heard ascending the secret stairway.

Led by Allison, the men charged into and down the passage, from the bottom of which streamed up the reflection of light from the counterfeiter's den.

A fearful struggle ensued upon the narrow, inter-mural stairs. Pistols banged and barked, men cursed in panting, savage growls.

Hand to hand came the fierce collision between law and crime.

Then there was a sullen quiet, broken by the sulphurous anathemas of prisoners. The gang—two of them badly wounded—were overpowered, manacled, the den, with its piles of tools, dies, plates, presses, and packages of spurious money ready for "shoving," lay spread before the Government agents.

It had proved a complete, a successful surprise.

Simons had not participated in the *melee* on the stairs leading to the underground crib. He was attracted by an astonishing resemblance to some one, in Coralie, who, terrified by the volleying pistols and oathful din, had crouched low in a far corner, as if she anticipated being stricken down with the rest.

"Who are you, miss? What is your name?"

"Oh, sir! My name is Coralie Damer. For the love of heaven, save me!—take me out of this place. You are an officer."

He hastened to her side with a pleased exclamation.

"Why, Miss Damer, you are the very young lady I am looking for. We know all about your being spirited off. Your sister, Madeline, is greatly worried—"

"Take me to Madeline."

"As soon as possible—depend upon it."

Allison and his assistants emerged from the secret panel with their prisoners. There were dark looks, scowls of impotent rage; but the handcuffs were on tightly.

"A regular mare's nest!" said the Government detective, shaking Simons's hand warmly. "Old boy, you sha'n't be forgotten for leading me to this trail, be sure of that."

An examination of Mr. Bob showed that he had gone to his last account. Coralie visibly trembled when this announcement was made.

"What affects you so particularly, Miss Damer?" Simons asked.

"I cannot help it. That man was my husband. Oh, such a horrible death as his has been!"

"Was his name Robert Daymon?"

"Yes. You knew him?"

"Your sister, Madeline, confided to me your sad trouble because of his baseness. You are freed from him forever now."

The prisoners were marched off. Simons escorted Coralie on his arm, much surprising Allison by the information that she was the identical young lady who had been abducted and for whom he was searching when they met.

Tip was dispatched to call in the policeman who had been left to guard the house around the corner. The telegraph boy was keeping close in Jack Simons's company. Something very important had transpired between them recently; he had had suddenly resigned his position on the messenger force that afternoon, and no longer wore his uniform.

An officer was left with charge of the saloon until some one could be sent to look after the dead bodies.

Daisy refused to leave her dead lover, and was left there, sobbing over him as if her heart would break.

The habitual drinkers and loafers who came, as usual, to Buck Gosh's saloon that night, were hugey astonished to find the globe set over the entrance extinguished, and a stalwart policeman in possession of the premises.

And, as if by magic, the ubiquitous newspaper reporter put in his appearance duly, at the saloon and at the Louisiana Avenue Station-house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WAYS OF "RED TAPE."

WASHINGTONIANS were destined for a succession of highly-colored sensations that week.

Thomas Bilspoon had indulged rather copiously in his favorite beverage, brandy and water, before retiring, and overslept himself on that bright, crisp Friday morning.

It was nearly noon when he finished the breakfast which had been ordered to his room, and he descended to the hotel office, swinging his gold-headed cane with all the pomp of a shoddy nabob and man who has perfected, to his entire satisfaction, a far-reaching scheme.

Naturally paramount in his thoughts was the plan for drugging and marrying Coralie on the approaching evening. He really considered her story of being already a married woman mere bosh, a trick born of her obstinacy.

"I shall have to procure a license," he mused, rubbing his bristly chin, musingly. "Aw-hm! It's all wrong, this license business. A relic of slave days—a nuisance to make a man pay for the privilege of marrying—quite high, in some places, too! No wonder foundling asylums are society requisites! But I'll have to get it. This afternoon will be time enough to look up a minister—they're plenty enough in this town: scores without any churches. Ah! my charming Coralie, you are sure to be my rosy bride!"

The old villain at least took a common-sense view of the license question. Instead of taxing aspirants for hymeneal bonds, there should be State premiums on the ceremony; and in this lack of civilized progress the fair State of Maryland is lamentably conspicuous, clinging to the barbaric custom, or antebellum crankiness, forbidding a man to take a wife without the consent of a toll-stealing master.

Bilspoon's ears soon discovered, by the general buzz, that something unusual had transpired in the morning's papers.

Buying a copy of the *Post*, and finding a seat in the reading-room, he settled himself to enjoy the double-column sensation, set with a flaring head on the first page—enjoy briefly, that was; then his face turned the color of a boiled lobster's, beads of perspiration came out on his rubicund nose, he fidgeted like a man beset by an army of hungry fleas.

There was a glowing account of the detectives' raid on the counterfeiter's den. Footing it was a series of revelation items that gave the astounded Bilspoon a start of huge alarm.

The scene of the important capture, as described by the paper, was the saloon of a man named Buck Gosh, on—th street. Singularly incidental to the general developments was the rescue of a beautiful young lady who had recently been abducted by a money-bags admirer, well ahead in years, who was determined to wed her against her will and without hesitating at any foul means of accomplishing his purpose. The young lady, admissibly shrinking from notoriety, had expressed a wish that her name be withheld. Nor had she, as yet, mentioned the name of the wealthy scoundrel who so outrageously persecuted her; though it was rumored that he hailed from the West and was then in Washington on business with the Government. The article concluded with the assertion that even outsiders were strongly exerting to ascertain the identity of the man, and if found there was every likelihood of his being publicly mobbed.

"By blazes!" snorted the ex-pork-packer, his sparse hair raising on end and his eyes bulging.

Dismayed by the turn of affairs, he fled hastily back to his room.

Hardly had he locked himself in, when there came a loud rap at the door that fairly caused him to jump in his boots.

"Who—who's there?" he gasped, in a cowardly fear that already the mob prospective was at his heels.

"Here's a telegram, sir," answered a servant.

Drawing a breath of relief, though still trembling, he opened the door, and in another minute was reading the following local dispatch:

"THOMAS BILSPOON:—I have just witnessed the passage of a number of claims-bills—among them yours. It is a sure go. Better go, now, to the Auditor's office and see if you can't hurry your matter. Congratulations.

SYKEY JUMBO."

Bilspoon revived a little at this welcome intelligence.

"Here, get me a carriage," he said to the servant who had lingered to see if there was any reply, and expecting the customary "tip."

"Yes, sir."

"A close carriage—understand? It must be a close carriage."

"Yes, sir."

Ten minutes thereafter he was on his way to the Auditor's office.

The following brief conversation occurred there, when he had introduced himself with a pompous flourish.

"Ah! so you are Mr. Thomas Bilspoon, of Cincinnati?"

"Yes, sir, I am that gentleman."

"And you have a claim?"

"Precisely. I have just been advised that it was voted on favorably among the first business of the Senate this noon."

"That is a matter doubtless very pleasant to you."

"Well, yes. Shall I call around to-morrow to get an order for the money?"

The official leaned back in his chair and surveyed Bilspoon as if he thought him suddenly gone stark mad.

"To-morrow! What are you thinking about? Why, my dear sir, it may be a whole year before that money is paid."

"What!" almost howled the man of pork, his jaw dropping.

"Do not excite yourself. Look here," tapping the butt of his quill against a stack of folded and indorsed documents very near two feet high.

Running the quill downward with a ratchety sound, he designated, at the very bottom, the worn and greasy claim of Thomas Bilspoon.

"There is your claim, sir, the last of the heap."

"The last!" echoed Bilspoon, staring.

"It has to come in rotation; there can be no partiality. There are fully two hundred ahead of you; all have to be re-audited, then sent to the Comptroller's office, where the vouchers have to be examined—"

"But the money is granted by Congress. The—"

"No matter, sir. The forms have to be gone through with. Each claim will consume one or more days."

Bilspoon perspired and wilted.

"But—aw-hm!—is there no process—that is—couldn't I do anything, perhaps, to facilitate—"

"Sir!"

"I want my money!" lugubriously.

"Sorry the Government has not made special rules for your convenience," was the sarcastic rejoinder.

Bilspoon withdrew, foaming and raging inwardly.

The emergency of the possible discovery of his connection with the abduction of Coralie was buried, for the moment, in his choleric fume over this new phase of affairs. He wanted to maul somebody. He spluttered and gnashed under his breath, as he strode back to his waiting cab.

"By blazes! it's a shame—a trick! I'll see Slapp about it. Slapp said to me the oth—Hello, who are you, sir?"

For, just as he was raising his foot to the carriage step, he was intercepted by a very small, rat-faced man who pulled at his sleeve.

"You are Thomas Bilspoon, of Cincinnati? I can not be mistaken."

"Not aware that I ever met you, sir," observed Bilspoon, brusquely.

"Oh, that don't matter. I am your best friend, just about this particular time. My name is Jumbo—Dickey Jumbo."

"Jumbo!" half-roared the ex-pork-packer.

He raised his gold-headed cane on high, as if to lay this Jumbo No. 2 dead in his tracks.

It seemed true that Jumbo No. 1 had done as much

as he bargained for: secured the passage of the claim, and remarkably quick at that. But it was still unsatisfactory; there was a quirky obstacle after all. His mood at the moment, after the "what-are-you-going-to-do-about-it" interview in the Auditor's office, was loud with wrath.

"Jumbo, the deuce, sir! Get out! I don't know you and I don't want to know you. Out of my way, or I'll crack your head, sir!"

"Oh, you mustn't do that," coolly returned this second edition of Jumbo, the "striker"—as such men are known in Washington.

"But I tell you I will. Get out!"

"You are attracting attention, sir."

Several pedestrians were halting to see what meant the flourishing of the heavy cane by a man with a very red face, and who had shouted vociferously the world-wide word:

"JUMBO!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A ROUTED MAN.

OBSERVING that he was making himself conspicuous on the busy street, Thomas Bilspoon recovered himself, though glancing belligerently around, and said:

"I have seen men before who called themselves 'Jumbo.'"

"Very probable. I have a brother named Sykey. He's a smart one, I can tell you."

"Yes, the Jumbos appear to be smart," ironically.

"I have business with you, if you are disposed to listen, sir," said Dickey Jumbo, in a tone only audible to Bilspoon.

"I don't see what it can be about."

"You have a claim pending."

"Well, sir, what if I have a dozen claims?"

"Oh, don't be so everlasting frilly about it. The claim has been voted through; it is now in the Auditor's office. But you may not get your money for some time yet, the way things are managed. I think I can prove of vast assistance to you."

"Oh!" whispered Bilspoon.

"Ahem!" scraped Jumbo.

The hackman was dismissed. Locking arms, the two adjourned to the alcoves of a restaurant near by.

"Now, how long have you been in Washington looking after your claim?" interrogated Jumbo No. 2, as they sipped their brandy and water.

"About a year, off and on."

"And you may have to wait a year longer."

"You seem to be posted, sir, at any rate."

"That is my trade. But, see here, it is too bad—that you should have to wait, I mean."

"D—arnation!" coughed Bilspoon.

"You are not up to snuff, old man."

"Aw-hm! well, no; looks so, I admit."

"Now, my dear sir, I have some friends in power here."

"Have you?"

"They are above bribery but willing to receive a fee for hard work."

"Just so. How much do you want?"

Bilspoon came direct to the point. His experience with Jumbo No. 1 had prepared him for this sort of dealing.

"Well, say \$10,000," with a profound wink.

"Your figure is outrageously high."

"Not if you pause to consider. There's your hotel bill for the year—not less than \$1,000. Incidentally—another thousand. You might as well double that, in the present prospect. Calculate what you gain in interest of immediately manipulated capital, besides saving of expenses. The amount I ask for my service is small."

Bilspoon reflected on these figures and the sum already paid to Jumbo No. 1.

"You are sure you can accomplish this thing? No mistake?"

"Not the slightest doubt about it. Give me a check now, here, for \$5,000—to scatter around, you know—and promise me another check like it, payable when you draw your money, and I will guarantee that you shall be on your way rejoicing within one week. Won't that be a fair thing?"

Bilspoon called for writing materials, made out the check desired, handed it over, and after a renewal of the brandy-and-water dose, the two separated.

Summoning another hack, the Cincinnati was driven to his hotel.

"I have not."

"No?"

"That is not the object of my visit."

"What then?"

"To warn you that if you do not leave this city within the space of three hours, and if you ever again, directly or indirectly, annoy Miss Coralie Damer, I shall track you down and see that the law visits full punishment upon you. Do you think you comprehend me?"

This was better luck than the man of pork had dared to hope for. Still, it was a bitter pill that he, with his colossal wealth, should be actually driven out of a town in free America. He plainly perceived, too, that Simons was a man who would sharply resent the offer of a bribe.

"Do you mean this?" he asked.

"Certainly, in every particular. You may thank your intended victim, however, for this lenient escape. She would not reveal your identity until I promised that you should be allowed to clear yourself out. Consider yourself fortunate."

"I do. I shall not wait three hours," declared Bilspron. "And—aw-hm!—you can say to Miss Coralie that I am exceedingly obli—"

"She wants no message from you. You have had my warning, now, sir—a fairer one than you deserve. See that you act upon it speedily. Good-day."

Promptly, when the detective withdrew, Bilspron sent down to ask that his bill be rendered.

Half an hour after he took his departure from the hotel, striding furiously toward the Potomac Depôt.

As he ascended the entrance steps a hearty weight of a familiar hand fell on his shoulder. The person who faced him was no other than the Honorable—Slapp.

"Why, Bilspron, old fellow!"

"How are you, Slapp?"

"Aren't running away, eh?"

"That is just what's the matter. I'm off. I want to get out of this devilish town. Don't detain me. Train's going."

"But, what about your claim?"

"Blast the claim!"

"Why, we sent it through to-day."

"Yes, and it has to be worked by a dozen different offices yet. Hang so much red tape. Why, sir, I am fully \$12,000 out, in cash, on that claim. This place is a shoal of sharks—yes, sir. When they get through juggling with that claim, I'll send somebody to collect it. But there's the bell ringing. Good-by, Slapp."

"Good-by, Bilspron."

He was barely in time to catch the train, the gong having sounded.

We part, here, with the portly man of pork, leaving him to his anomalous reflections over a strong cigar, which he vigorously puffed in the smoking-car, as the scene of his exploits, harassments, pocket-depletion, vain love, balked schemes and final utter rout faded swiftly behind him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONVEGING THE TRAIL.

THE funeral of Cecilia Allsworth, as announced by the *Orbit*, was to take place at three o'clock that afternoon.

Long before the hour named, quite a crowd had collected near and in front of the palatial residence on Massachusetts avenue, and it became necessary to summon policemen to keep the pavement clear.

Such demonstrations are uncommon for Washington. Some other cities—and especially Baltimore—are noted for the multitudes of men, women and children who habitually congregate at every funeral, no matter how unimportant, jamming before doorways, blocking sidewalks, with, possibly, no earthly object but to gorg an insatiate curiosity, and this much to the annoyance of the bereaved families.

The great and general sensation produced by the remarkable circumstances of Cecilia's death, was now the cause of one of these unusual sights upon the fashionable thoroughfare of the capital, and some were bold enough to seek admittance for a view of the lovely corpse beneath its load of flowers.

There was deep sincere mourning over the young and beautiful victim of the outrage, and a vast attendance, of those who had known and admired her in their own society, packed the spacious, darkened parlors, many unable to conceal their tears of sorrow for the dead and sympathy for the living.

Marc Ludley (the disguised Madeline) was there. The hazel eyes were very grave, expressive of an inward wondering. Marc could hardly realize it all, knowing that when Cecilia was last seen she seemed to be fully recovering from her extraordinary fright.

Jack Simons was there. But no one, save John Allsworth, knew that the gray-headed and bearded, bent-formed old gentleman in blue coat and brass buttons, and wearing large spectacles, was the keen detective.

In a dark corner sat a rather stout and richly-attired lady whose face was veiled so heavily that not an outline of her features was visible. It was Mrs. Cornish, the reputed widow. Her handkerchief was held to her eyes, under her veil, and her sobbing was painfully marked.

There was another, a sleek-looking gentleman, among the gathered concourse of friends, on which the glance of the detective rested covertly and scrutinizingly anon.

He was tall, sinewy, not unhandsome, discernibly a foreigner, with jet-black eyes, rather dark complexion, and wearing a tremendous Napoleonic mustache.

Simons sought Mr. Allsworth, and through a door-crack pointed out this personage.

"Who is that man?" he asked.

"I really cannot say."

"You do not know him at all?"

"I am certain I do not. Perhaps a member of the French Legation. He looks like a Frenchman, I think."

"You are mistaken."

"Well, maybe he is not a Frenchman."

"I do not mean that."

"What do you mean, then?"

"He is not a member of the French Legation."

"No?"

"I am familiar with the face of every member on it. He is not one."

"Who can he be?"

"That is just what I propose finding out," said the detective, meaningly.

At the moment of this conversation the man was standing beside the coffin contemplating the features of the dead. Suddenly, and unobserved by any one, he started slightly, a strange look, like that we might by some unexpected discovery, crossing his intent face.

His jetty brilliant eyes glittered; he leaned a little forward as if to obtain a closer view. Then he stepped back from the coffin.

Others moved forward to the casket as he made room. No one noticed his actions, as he went seemingly unintentionally toward the rear door of the parlor opening into an alcove, where a female figure stood aloof.

It was Finfin.

As he approached her, the girl's face turned ashy and she visibly trembled with pent excitement.

"Jacques!—you here?" she exclaimed, low and huskily.

"Hush, *ma petite*! Not so loud."

"What are you doing here? You are very bold!"

"True, of ze fear I have not any. But pay attention, Finfin. You go to ze funeral, eh?"

"Yes, they say I may go, my poor mistress loved me so very much."

"Ver' good. Zen, my Finfin, remembair: you find out for me ze numbar exact of ze lot where ze young lady s'all be buried. At ze gate in ze garden to-night you give me a papair wiz ze same on it. Put zis in your hair."

He handed her a miniature dagger, about five inches long, its handle incrusted with gold.

"What am I to do with this?" questioned Finfin, obeyingly adjusting the dagger like an ornamental hair-pin.

"It may be ze young lady not be put in ze ground, but in ze tomb. At ze Oak Hill *Cimetière* sometime on one lot we find two tomb. If ze young lady s'all have been put in ze tomb, you drive ze dagger into ze hilt by ze stone at ze door and break him off. Zen I s'all easy find ze blade—you see?"

"But what are you going to do, Jacques?"

"Tut, tut, zat is of my affair. Do you explicit what I have say. Remember if you fail—Toulon!"

He left her, with the last word containing a latent menace.

Almost instantaneously a grasp closed on her wrist from behind. She turned and found herself confronted by the spectacled old gentleman with blue coat and brass buttons.

"My girl, who was that man who just spoke with you?"

Jack Simons had witnessed the exchange of words between the two, though he had not heard what was said.

For a second Finfin shivered, her lips seemed glued.

"Come, do not attempt to evade me, or it will be the worse for you. Who is that man?—his name?"

He slyly turned the lapel of his vest, and again, as the startled girl stared, the badge of office produced its prompt effect.

"Jacques!" she gulped, as it choking.

"Enough. I thought so."

He wheeled abruptly away.

The Frenchman was then bending over the heavily-vailed head of Mrs. Cornish. He was whispering this:

"You must attend ze funeral, madame."

"Oh, Monsieur Derdier! I fear I cannot sustain it. Think: it is my own child that is lying there, while I, the outcast and wretch that I am, dare not clasp her in my arms, dare not—"

"Pesta! It is not ze time for ze t'eatrical, madame. It is ze minute of business. Listen to me. It is of ze import extraordinary zat you s'all go to ze funeral. You must s'all make for me a—what you say?—a diagram of ze burying-ground exact, so I am able to find ze grave, ze tomb of ze young lady, by ze night. Listen, and I whisper to you what I have discoverair."

He leaned closer, whispered lower something in the ear of Mrs. Cornish, that had an electric effect.

"You are jesting! Impossible! It is unheard-of!" she exclaimed, almost unguardedly loud.

"Hush!" he admonished. "It is ze grand fact, I tell you. *J'en suis si sûr que j'en mettrai la main au feu!*"

The Frenchman left the house. Outside he had a cab. Leaping into this, he was driven rapidly off in obedience to some hurried instructions.

"Divile!" he burst forth, hissing. "It is ze deep game of ze detectives—ha! Zey fool me, eh? Oh, no! *Nous verrons!*"

He had made a wonderful discovery. In connection with it there was call for action and plot ahead.

At an unsuspecting distance behind the Frenchman's hack there followed another hack containing Jack Simons, who within the vehicle, altered his disguise to that of Jerry Smyrck.

To Simons's surprise, the leading hack stopped in the Northern Liberties, and before the very house we have seen the detective visit on the night of Cecilia's death, having above its door the sign:

MADAME D'ESTE.

Receptions in French, Italian and English.

Dismissing his driver, the Frenchman entered the house.

The detective had not long to wait for the appearance of his game. He would have liked to also enter the house, and ascertain what had been the object of the Frenchman's visit to the clairvoyant.

But he was at last close on the trail of the mysterious Jacques, and dared not lose sight of him.

CHAPTER XXX.

LYON'S LITTLE BUSINESS.

VERY carefully did Mrs. Cornish obey the instructions of M. Derdier, her French secretary.

Accompanying the funeral *cortege* to Oak Hill, her eyes, beneath her hiding vail, were busy noting every turn and movement of the carriages, fixing landmarks in memory until, when she, with the others, stood beside the open, waiting tomb, she

knew she could easily describe the spot in a drawing.

At the extreme interior of the tomb there were cloth-bound trestles, and she learned that on these it was intended the coffin should remain for several days before its final sealing up forever.

Finfin had managed to work herself close to the iron-plated door. Obedient to the command she had received from Jacques, her mysterious master, the girl stooped unperceived and dextrously inserted the miniature dirk between the two flags forming the footsill, snapping the blade cleanly at the hilt.

The ceremony of the interment over, Mrs. Cornish was driven away from the cemetery, ordering her driver to make good speed.

She bore no evidence now of the great sorrow that had possessed her while in the parlor of the Allsworth mansion; instead, her delicately rouged cheeks glowed, she was palpably excited, trembling, and there shone an eager, suspensive light in her eyes.

"Can it be possible that Monsieur Derdier is right?" she murmured, whisperingly. "Oh, no! It is too marvelous for belief! And yet—if true—what can it mean?"

Arrived at her residence she entered with the paramount intention of summoning M. Derdier at once for an explanation of the certain enigma words he had whispered to her in the presence of the corpse.

She was met by a surprise.

"There's a gentleman to see you, ma'am," announced the servant who admitted her.

"A gentleman? Who is he?"

"That I don't know, ma'am."

"Well, he may leave his card. Tell him I am engaged just now, and will be pleased to have him call again—"

"Beggin' your pardon, ma'am—but he says you must see him."

"Must!"

Mrs. Cornish elevated her brows, flushed vexedly, then with royal hauteur went toward the rear parlor to confront the impudent individual who dared to say she "must" see him.

Her visitor was Lyon, the senior of the detective firm.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mrs. Cornish?"

He bowed gallantly.

"I am that lady, sir. What is your business?" she curtly inquired.

"I have called to speak with you regarding your child."

"My child?" with a start. "Oh, you mean Mr. Lyn Cornish."

"I do not allude to Mr. Lyn Cornish. I have not been aware of the existence of such a person. My visit is in reference to the child born while you were abroad."

"Sir! I do not understand your remark."

There was a sudden pallor in her face; but her composure was perfect.

"Let us not beat about the bush. As you may suspect, I am an officer of the law—a detective," he said, quietly. "Your name, 'Cornish,' is an assumed one. Your true name is Adelia Allsworth. You are John Allsworth's wife, who eloped with a man named Lloyn Ambrose, nearly nine years ago. You perceive, madam, I have the honor of being acquainted with you pretty thoroughly."

She sank into a chair, regarding him in a half-stupefied way.

Her secret was known, then? What was coming? Had Allsworth deplored this man to urge that the recreant wife return, after all these years, to her husband and family? No. She knew the proud, stern nature of John Allsworth too well to suppose that for an instant. And, oh! how the heart of this deluded woman was secretly aching, as it weighed its own falsity—the purity, love, sweet ties that had been cast aside for an infatuation which left her, now, a life of hollowness, remorse, and a constant dread of an exposure in connection with villainous M. Derdier comprising the degradation of a felon's cell.

"Well, sir?" was all she could find voice to say, realizing the uselessness of any attempt at equivocation.

"About three months after your flight, a child was born to you, of which occurrence you apprised your deserted husband."

"True. What then?" she demanded, in an accent peculiarly sharp.

"You permitted your husband to know that somewhere—only somewhere—in the wide world he had a child, perhaps even ignored by the mother that bore it, a waif that might never see or know of its grieving father—"

"You are mistaken," she interrupted.

"I shall be glad if I am. I hope it has not been neglected—"

"I thought you wanted me to call him in?"
 "I do."
 "It is only necessary for me to tap the bell—"
 "But wait. He must not see me."
 "Not see you?—why?"
 "I shall ask you to do me a favor."
 "What is it?"
 "Allow me to secrete myself behind yonder curtains."
 "That is a singular request."
 "It is very important, however."
 "What is your object?"

"To hear what passes when you say to this Derdier that you have just heard of your boy being positively alive—not dead, as supposed—and you insist upon some explanation of such a mystery. There may exist reasons why the man, Derdier, would give you no satisfaction in the presence of a third party."

"That is plausible."
 "Would you be glad or sorry, to know that your child lived?"

"I do not know," she sighed. "Perhaps it would have been better for it to have died in innocent babyhood than live to learn— But, pshaw! Of course it is dead. What you advance is, I repeat, impossible."

"Very well, we shall see. Will you grant my request?"
 "Yes."

Lyon stepped behind the luxurious drapery of damask at one of the windows.

The jeweled hand of Mrs. Cornish reached outward over the table, and the sharp, clear tone of the silver bell sounded, bringing a servant promptly to the room.

"Is Monsieur Derdier at home?"
 "Yes, ma'am; he's now in the cellar, ma'am."

Mrs. Cornish looked the astonishment she felt at this singular reply.

"In the cellar?" she repeated, in mystification.

"Oh, yes, ma'am; he goes down there every day about this time, regular. I've noticed it a month or more, ma'am."

"Tell monsieur Derdier that I wish to see him as quickly as possible," she ordered, shortly.

The servant bowed and departed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BATCH OF PROOFS.

THE servant was not long in finding and delivering to M. Derdier the message that Mrs. Cornish wished to see him immediately.

He entered the parlor, wearing his grim smile beneath the curling mustache that habitually exposed his clean white teeth.

"Madame sent for me," he remarked, bowing with courtly grace.

The detective, watching from his concealment, confessed inwardly to some admiration for the man's sinuous, athletic build and engaging elegance of carriage.

"Monsieur Derdier, I have just heard a strange piece of news."

"Ah! What is ze news so astonishing?"
 "It is of my child—the one, I mean, which was born while I was in England, nine years ago, and supposed to have died there."

"Eh, bien!" with a shrug.
 "Did it really die?"
 "Why sould madame doubt it at zis day?"

"Because I've been informed that it is alive."
 "Voici bien une autre chanson!"

"You do not give me a straight answer."
 "What I must s'all say—eh?"

"The boy?—this extraordinary possibility of his not having died?"

"Well, madame, it is correct."
 "My child lives?"

"Oui, madame."

She was utterly amazed by this unexpected admission.

"But what has been the object in perpetrating such a trick?" she demanded, quickly.

"Zere is no reason why I sould a-hide it from you—no reason why I sould have keep it from you zese many year," half interrupted the smooth-voiced Derdier, easily. "Ze boy, he eez alive. Let me tell you. Ze Monsieur Lloyn Ambrose not like to have any bozzer wiz ze brat."

"Brat!" she cried, indignantly.

"Patience, madame. So he have call ze child. He ordair me to take ze babe zat I s'all strangle it to deat."

"Oh, heaven! The monster!"

"You see, ze Monsieur Ambrose was, as I say to you before, one grand rascal—but a vair fine fellow. Ha, ha! But I did not strangle ze babe. Bah! It is easy to be rid of it anot'er way. I give him to one old dame who grow him a while, till Monsieur Ambrose die by ze bullet; zen I bring him ovair to America. Yes, ze boy is alive; he ees a-vair smart. I have my eye on him all ze time, constant."

"And where is he now?"

"In ze city Washington—here."

"But where? What is he doing? How is he living?"

"He is ze Mercury messengair of ze telegraph company."

"You must bring him to me at once."

"Vair well; I s'all have no objection."

"You promise to bring him?"

"If madame wish. Why not? I make not'ing by keeping him from you."

Mrs. Cornish would have terminated the interview at this point. But the Frenchman said:

"One moment, madame. You have been to ze funeral?"

"Yes, I have just returned."

"Tres bien! You will a-give me now ze information important, exact, where I s'all find by night ze grave of—"

She turned very white, gasped, and checked him by a motion.

"Yes, yes; but not now, not here," almost in a whisper.

"You are timid."

"I will converse with you in the library directly. See: I have not yet so much as removed my street attire. In the library, Monsieur Derdier."

He bowed and withdrew, unsuspecting of the real cause of her perturbation.

A few words more, and he might have dropped sufficient to arouse the keenest suspicions of the concealed detective.

"You heard?" she queried.
 "All."
 "I am lost in surprise."
 "Quite natural. I was tolerably sure of this fact before; now we have substantial proof."
 "What are your intentions regarding the boy?"
 "I shall give him to his father."
 "No—give him to me," she cried.
 "I cannot do that—"
 "You must—you shall. I will have him."
 "You compel me to remark, madam, that when a wife deserts her husband as you have, the law, once appealed to, would make very quick disposition of the child, in favor of the father."

The unhappy woman groaned.

"I called to-day," pursued Lyon, "under the impression that you were fully aware of the boy's existence, and to obtain from you, if possible, positive corroboration of his identity. It is greatly to your credit, I must say, that I am convinced you were in ignorance regarding him. I have him now in safe-keeping; he is no longer in the employ of the telegraph company. As to your last remark, let me ask: can you honestly think you have any claim to guardianship? Remember the position you have placed yourself in before the world. With his father, the boy will have not only every educational advantage, but, besides, a noble inheritance, which cannot reach him save through that parent. With you—surely you would shrink from the revelation of your falsity, of the disgrace you brought upon yourself. And this boy, when a man, would demand complete—not garbled—explanations of why his parents are sundered. Your secret—the secret of the Allsworths—is known to but few; they give but slight memory to the scandal. John Allsworth—for I know him well—will screen the sin of the mother from his son's knowledge. Try and be resigned, madam. For, as Heaven is my Judge, it is far better, I believe, that Adelia Allsworth should remain dead to the world. Keep widely clear from your husband; maintain the part you play as—Mrs. Cornish."

It was a very calm, very impressive little speech that the detective made, and at its conclusion, he bowed himself out of the parlor.

She bent forward heavily on the table at her side, her regal head buried on her arms, and up from her lips murmured, moaning:

"Oh, God! it is just, but it is hard. Yes, I am dead to the world—a wanderer. Oh, the folly, the wicked folly of my past!"

When Finfin returned from the funeral, she was notified that her immediate presence was desired in the library.

Here she found seated, awaiting her, John Allsworth and Jack Simons, the latter not wearing, now, any disguise.

"Well, my girl, I suppose you know who I am?" Simons said, his bold, black eyes leveled steadily on the French maid.

"It is monsieur, the detective."

"Now—precisely. You will answer a few questions. No evasions, or, I warn you plain enough, I shall send you straight to the lock-up."

Finfin's dusky face grew pale.

"Monsieur may command."

"Before I put my questions, it may facilitate by telling you that I have found, and by to-morrow will have caged, a very bold rascal who is known to you as Jacques. Speak out, now, whatever you know about the fellow. More, tell me what you know about the stealing of the jewels—for, mark me well, I have proof that you do know something. Remember: no evading, no lies, or you and this Jacques go to prison together."

She suddenly threw herself on her knees before them, clasping her hands, and an expression of intense, terrified supplication settled in her dusky face.

"I will tell you everything!"

"Do so. That is what I expect."

Briefly the girl related that she had first met Jacques in Paris. Her father and Jacques belonged to a gang of garroters in the French capital; compelled by her villainous parent she played the part of spy and decoy in many ways. At last she was arrested, tried, sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. Her father was killed in the police raid in which she was taken. Jacques, by means of a trained chimpanzee which he owned, had effected her escape from prison, and the authorities, inclined to believe that the pretty girl had been but an unwilling tool in the hands of the garroters, had taken no rigorous measures for her recapture. Since then she had been a very slave to Jacques, who declared that he held a certain paper capable of sending her back to the hateful cell at Toulon. She was brought by Jacques to America. She had been at service in different wealthy households, where it was her invariable task to ascertain the repository of jewels or other valuables, and communicate the same, with a detail of utmost exactness, to Jacques. He would then put the chimpanzee through a period of special training as nearly as possible like what it would have to perform when committing the real robbery.

On the night of the disappearance of the Allsworth jewels, Finfin surprised the chimpanzee in Cecilia's room, as the animal was making off with the box. It was Finfin who obtained an impression in wax from her mistress's bedroom key. She had a duplicate key made for herself. She was devoted to her lovely young mistress; she was resolved to prevent the burglary by frightening off the chimpanzee, knowing that Jacques could not prove she had thwarted him. There was a struggle for the possession of the jewel-box, during which it was wrenched open, and she sustained the slight wound which had excited a suspicion, at first, of her complicity in the burglary. With one hand she had laid hold upon the jewels. The chimpanzee, being a powerful beast, secured its booty. But for the fact that it knew and recognized Finfin, it is probable that she would have been assaulted with the same ferocity of its attack upon Cecilia.

"What have you to say about the diamond found in your bedroom?" interrogated Simons, when she had concluded.

"It is mysterious to me, monsieur. But I have

thought, perhaps when I fought with Lepo, to save the treasure of my mistress, the gem was caught in my sleeve and afterward dropped where it was found. I have told you the truth, monsieur; I swear it by the holy Virgin! I can say no more."

"You see, Mr. Allsworth, we are now soon to have the jewels back."

"But, Mr. Simons, is there not a possibility that, if you are precipitate in apprehending this ingenious burglar, he may stubbornly refuse to disclose where the plunder is hidden?"

"A fair suggestion. I must consider that. Finfin, you have given valuable information. It will go far in the betterment of your prospects."

"You will not send me back to prison—to Toulon?"

"At present I do not think it likely."

"And Jacques?"

"Have no further fear of him. But mark me: you are not to communicate with him again. You are not to leave this house under any circumstances until I give you permission."

"I will obey, monsieur."

"And now I must be off. As you are aware, there is a life or death matter to be attended to now. My plot was a severe one, but it has accomplished its purpose. The old superstition that a murderer will return to look upon his victim, has worked its truth in this instance, for, though not actually the assassin himself, it was beside the coffin of your daughter that I spotted and afterward trailed down the French villain Jacques!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FEARFUL DISCOVERY.

WHEN Lyon, after his interview with Mrs. Cornish, returned to the agency on Fifteenth street, the lad, Tip, was there—indeed, the ex-telegraph messenger had taken up a fixed residence with the detectives, who, with the prize in hand, would run no risk of losing sight of him.

"Ah! my lad," he said, smiling gayly, "we shall soon have you set up all right. No more street life for you, but a comfortable home, a loving father, finest of school chances that money can buy. You have quite a brilliant prospect—don't you think so?"

"You're sure I'm the right boy?" Tip asked, dubiously.

He was evidently informed of the good fortune in store for him.

"Oh, yes; that is settled beyond a doubt."

"I shall be so glad to see my father!" was the little fellow's fervent exclamation. "Do you think he will really be glad that he's found me?"

"My dear child, your father is a splendid gentleman all over. He is just crazy to get you into his arms; that's all."

"I want to see him ever-so-much."

"It won't be long before you are gratified."

A few minutes later Jack Simons entered.

"Come into the back room, Mr. Lyon, I want to speak with you."

And when they were alone, Lyon queried, briefly:

"Well?"

"The case has come to a focus."

"About the jewels or the murderer?"

"Both."

"You have made quick work of it."

"I know where the jewels went; I know the party who attempted the murder of Cecilia Allsworth."

"Attempted! Egad! I think, although the wounds she received were not the direct, absolute cause of her death, that does not render the burglar much less innocent of the crime."

"Well, I have no time to go into big explanations now; if I had I could make you open your eyes pretty wide. I have cornered my game."

"Have you? Good!"

"It is time to close in."

"You want help?"

"Yes."

"You're captain of this job, Simons. Just state your plans and I'll see them carried out to the letter."

"The man who is 'wanted' lives at No. — Massachusetts avenue, in the next square below the Allsworth mansion. His name is Marmon Derdier—abroad he was known as Jacques Something-or-other. He is a full-blooded Frenchman. He has conducted his burglaries, here and elsewhere, by means of a remarkably well-trained chimpanzee. I have an ample succession of proofs that he made off with the Allsworth jewels. The house must be placed under surveillance, front and rear; he must not slip through my fingers. I shall not be able to come down on him before morning, as I have something to attend to first of vast and urgent import. I had thought it best to watch him awhile, to get surely on the track of the plunder, if disposed of; but the interval has been so short, the shops of Washington have been warned and are on the lookout, and I have satisfactory evidence that my man could not have gone elsewhere to negotiate. So, I conclude that the articles must be still somewhere close in his proximity. We catch him; we have only to search thoroughly near him. The jewels are in his dwelling."

Lyon was a gaping listener. He exclaimed, in astonishment:

"Why, this is extraordinary! Are you sure you haven't made a crooked stumble?"

"I guess I know what I am about? But why is it extraordinary?"

"You have named the residence of Mrs. Cornish, the mother of our boy, here, Tip."

"She is Adelia Allsworth, then?"

"Yes. I have just come from there. I have seen this man, Derdier."

"Then you have seen the burglar."

"I have obtained almost incontrovertible proof of Tip's identity."

"That's good. But we can attend to the boy's case later. You will look after the house and man for me?"

Simons disappeared and did not show himself again until near the hour of midnight. He was very busy during the interval.

Promptly at twelve o'clock, Marc Ludley came into the office.

It was a black night with gusty wind that whirled an occasional snow-flake over the deserted thoroughfares, indicating the approach of a wintry storm.

About the same minute that Ludley put in an appearance, a hack drove up to the curb before the agency with spectral quietness and paused there as if awaiting some one.

"You are punctual," said Simons.

"Yes. My patient is really so improved that when I spoke of having an engagement at midnight he declared his ability to take care of himself, and urged me to go."

"Poor Daymon! We have been suspecting him very unjustly."

"So it seems."

"Well, come along. The hack, I see, is at the door. As we go, I will explain just what we have to do to-night and why we have to do it."

They entered the hack and were driven rapidly off, Ludley overhearing the order given to the driver, which was:

"Now, Lem, straight to Oak Hill—the spot at the fence I showed to you this afternoon."

"All right, sir."

The hackman was a shrewd and trustworthy fellow who had served the detective on other occasions.

As they moved away, Simons said to Ludley:

"There has been some mystery to you, hasn't there?"

"Yes, considerable."

"Well, I will clear up some of it."

"I would like to have you do so."

"You think Cecilia Allsworth is dead?"

"Why, of course. Dead and buried—though I cannot understand it."

"You will presently. She is buried—or, rather, she is entombed—but she is not dead."

"Buried alive!" cried Ludley, horrified.

"Yes and no. We are on our way now to release her from her dangerous position."

Simons then proceeded to relate his strange plot. His visit to the clairvoyant had been to procure a certain powder, the administering of which to a human being would produce a semblance of death so positive that even ablest physicians could hardly discover the deception. This powder was intended to be given to Cecilia. John Allsworth had strongly demurred to the detective's programme, but at last consented to the hazardous experiment. It was his own hand that gave the drug to his daughter.

Simons's theory had been realized even more fully than he had expected. The mysterious Jacques, the Frenchman, toward whom so many linking incidents pointed, not only appeared at the funeral, but, in addition, Finfin had identified him by name.

The Frenchman's visit was one of mere curiosity to look upon the dead young lady, the victim of Lepo's claws. But, as we have seen, he had made some singular discovery, while bending over the corpse, which caused him a peculiar excitement.

The game was now in the net. It only remained to bring to life again the beautiful girl who had necessarily, and unknowingly to herself, played a terrible part of ordeal, when the whole case promised winding up its successful issue.

Marc Ludley heard all this in silent amazement.

"The superintendent is in my secret," was Simons's concluding remark. "We will find him waiting for us to-night, so that there will be no trouble. He has duplicate keys. Within two hours I hope to have Miss Allsworth safe again in her own home; and in the morning by the bright light 'the Capitol jail will receive a new inmate in the person of the individual, Jacques."

As anticipated, the superintendent of the cemetery was awaiting them—not at the main entrance, but at an embrasure in a far side of the cemetery, whither the hack had wound its way.

Ludley was introduced as an assistant on the force. Dark lanterns were prepared for convenient use. While the hack remained standing, almost invisible in the dense gloom, the three moved forward to the tomb where the body of Cecilia had been so impressively deposited during the afternoon.

Entering among the recesses of the dead in solemn silence, the lanterns were turned on simultaneously.

A startled cry broke from the lips of all.

The body of Cecilia Allsworth was gone!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN A CORNER.

THERE was the richly-trimmed coffin on the trestles.

But the lid had been removed—evidently with careful deliberation—and was standing tilted against the wall.

The sacred precinct of the dead had been outraged.

It would be impossible to adequately describe the feelings of the three as they groped around, gazing, transfixed, at the empty coffin.

"This is remarkable!" exclaimed the superintendent, being first to find power of utterance.

The detective's face was of ghostly white as he responded:

"It is worse than that—worse than you dream of!"

"What do you mean?" Ludley asked.

"This looks like the work of body-snatchers—"

"Quick ones, at that," the superintendent interposed. "But how they could have obtained a fitting key for the padlock of the tomb, in so brief a space of time, beats my comprehension!"

"They have smart ways. But you did not hear me out. I say this looks like the work of body-snatchers; at the same time I do not think it is."

"You don't! Then what do you think?"

"Wait."

Simons was glancing about keenly in search of some signs to indicate the nature of the recent presence; but nothing was discoverable.

Then he went out of the tomb and swept the rays of his bull's-eye down over the russet sod around the entrance, while his bold black eyes closely scrutinized here and there.

"I can see a trail," he presently uttered.

They came to the spot where he was pointing downward.

"It is a single trail, made by a person entering and leaving the tomb. You will observe that only the tracks made by leaving are visible. That is because the ground is hard with frost; it required a double weight to make even the impress of the heel. Only one person has been inside the tomb; that person carried off Cecilia Allsworth."

"My dear sir, she must be found! Just think of that young lady being now on her way to the dissecting-room!—alive, too!—"

"Let me tell you something."

"What is it?"

"I do not think that the young lady has been taken by any ordinary ghoul."

"You have a suspicion."

"Yes, and a strong one. Should my surmise prove true, however, it will be fully as bad for her as if she was really killed by the dissecting knives."

"You don't mean it!" aghast.

"But I do."

"My! my!" the superintendent groaned. "I never did like plots of any kind—this is the first one I ever consented to participate in during my whole life. What is to become of me! There will be inquiry, discovery, *furore*. Oak Hill will be ruined."

Simons was a little disgusted by this apparent selfishness.

"It would be better to think more of her peril, sir, than of yourself. Heaven help her! I have in my pocket the antidote to revive her; and if it is not administered before six o'clock this A. M., the duration of her trance will terminate in actual death!"

His hearers let fall horrified ejaculations.

Great and irremediable looked the peril of Cecilia Allsworth then.

"Ludley, come with me," the detective said, suddenly.

Bidding the dazed, fretful superintendent a short good-by, they hurried out of the cemetery to the waiting hack.

"Back to the agency, Lem.; and drive smartly," was the order.

Lem., the driver, divined that something had gone amiss. He made his horses travel at a lively rate, once on the open highway.

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Simons! Can you not save Miss Allsworth?"

"All that can will be done, depend."

"But there is no time to lose."

"I am painfully aware of that."

"You take it coolly."

"Nothing can be gained by excitement. I have already decided on a procedure which may be successful."

"Tell me what it is."

"I think I know who has taken Miss Allsworth from the tomb."

"Who?"

"Jacques, the Frenchman."

"Why do you think so?"

"He is a cunning, as well as bold villain. He may have learned, somehow, that we are on his track."

"But what would be his object in the stealing of a supposed corpse?"

"He may have discovered that it was not a corpse."

"How could that be possible? And, even granting it, still what object could there be in robbing the coffin?"

"Now you are propounding conundrums that have no relevance save in the hereafter. I have only stated my theory. And when you know me better, you will learn that if Jack Simons forms a theory he works it for all it is worth—to the last thin thread."

Fortunately they found Lyon, the chief, at the agency.

A brief conversation ensued.

Then Simons, Lyon and Ludley entered the hack and were driven away toward Massachusetts avenue.

"You say there are two men employed in watching the house?" Simons inquired of his chief.

"Yes, two good fellows."

"We may need them."

"Oh, they can be quickly signaled."

When they finally alighted it was before the residence of Mrs. Cornish.

Lyon signaled for his subordinates, and they were soon at his side.

"Have you anything to report?" the chief interrogated.

"Nothing special, except that there was a hack arrival awhile ago."

"Ah! a hack. Anything suspicious about it?"

"Only that the man who got out seemed to have a big bag in his arms."

"Come," Simons said, advancing up the steps; "follow me."

He was convinced, now, that Cecilia was in the power of Jacques.

The windows and transoms were heavily curtained; not a ray of light was to be seen.

He pulled the bell, and, somewhat unexpectedly, the door was instantly thrown wide. Simultaneously the servant who opened the door blurted forth:

"Oh! it isn't the express, but a gang of men!"

The door would have been banged shut again unceremoniously; but the detectives forced ahead in a body, their gleaming badges exposed.

A surprising sight was presented to them.

The hall was blazily lighted. Ranged along the walls were a number of large trunks and chests, apparently packed and being packed. Several servants who were bustling about, carrying bundles and articles hither and thither, paused to gaze in astonishment at the intrusion of so many strange men. The words of the servant who had admitted them showed that a hasty flight was contemplated.

"Just in time!" muttered Simons; and, addressing the nearest servant, he demanded: "Where is your Monsieur Derdier?"

"Lor'! I don't know, sir. Hain't seen him to-night."

The bright badges of the law officers had an awing effect, but the sternest questioning failed to elicit any information as to the whereabouts of M. Derdier. No one knew where he might be, if in the house at all; he had not been seen since last sun-down.

"I don't think you'll find him here," said one.

"I've been through nearly all the rooms up-stairs,

sir, and there's nobody up there, as I can see, but Mrs. Cornish and Mr. Lyn."

Lyon nudged Simons, saying:

"Let us go to the cellar."

"What for?"

"I have an idea we will find our man there."

"What makes you think so?"

He communicated the speech he had overheard the servant make when, during his call that afternoon, Mrs. Cornish had inquired whether M. Derdier was at home.

Leaving the two deputies in the hallway, Simons and Lyon descended to the cellar.

Another surprise awaited them here.

The cellar would have been enveloped in pitchy darkness but for the fact that, at one side, there was a glimmer of light coming through what appeared to be a doorway cut in the stone foundation of the building.

Beyond this aperture was a small furnace ingeniously connected with the furnace flue of the house; an anvil and light tools stood near. On all sides was a collection of apparatus like what is met with in a chemical laboratory.

In the center of this secret underground apartment was Jacques.

He was on his knees engrossed with stuffing something, regardless of mode, into a leather sachet. The lamp beside him rayed on a mass of shining, flashing objects in his hands.

Simons could scarce refrain from an exultant cry. The Allsworth jewels were before him!

The first that Jacques knew of the intruders was when a stern voice said:

"Well, my fine fellow, I guess we've got you!"

He looked up with startled, burning orbs. A deep-drawn curse issued from his lips. Quick as thought he kicked one limb outward, overturning and extinguishing the light.

"*Sacre Dieu!* You are ze detectives. But you have a-not me yet!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A CONSUMMATION COMPLETE.

The Frenchman hoped to elude them in the darkness. But in this he had miscalculated.

There was a significant click! click!—a momentary, fuse-like combustion—and the brilliant light of a bull's-eye flashed on the surrounding.

Central in the illumination stood Jacques, at bay.

His high-curling mustache, tawny complexion, scintillating eyes and tigerish-grinning smile imparted a Satanic mien.

"What you s'all want of me—eh?" he snarled, noting well that two polished revolvers were leveled in a dead aim upon him.

"You'll find that out soon enough, my frisky Jacques. Come, give it up. We've got you."

"I's all give not up to you for anysing."

"You won't yield?"

"I will not surrendair to you. You nevar get me. I have ze reason."

"Oh, you have a reason! Well, we will take that later. Hold out your hands for these. Keep him 'covered,' Lyon."

Jack Simons, Detective.

"No, because if such a person is here, I am prepared to swear that I know nothing of it; nor can I imagine why there should be any young lady secreted in my house."

In this she spoke truly, and it was apparent by her earnestness.

"We will soon find out," declared the detective.

"You are at liberty to satisfy yourselves."

An immediate search was instituted.

Room after room was gone through and examined thoroughly. At last they came to one in the third story, the door of which was locked.

The two detectives, with a concerted movement, fairly burst the door from its hinges.

Standing in the center of the apartment before them was Cecilia Allsworth.

There was a frightened look in her lovely face, but this was instantly supplanted by a joyous light as she saw the badges on their lapels.

"Oh! I am safe!—safe!" she cried, running forward.

Simons kept a tight clutch on the sachet containing the jewels, as if he feared they would take wings; but with his disengaged hand he took both her palms in his, saying:

"You are quite safe, Miss Allsworth, Heaven be praised."

Cecilia's story was told in a few words. She did not remember anything after taking a dose of medicine, which her father administered, until awaking to find herself in a strange bedroom. Bending over her couch was a tall, tawny-faced man, dressed neatly, his eyes piercingly black, and a large mustache twisted into rings at the ends.

This man had assured her that she need not apprehend the least danger to herself if she would quietly realize that she was his prisoner, and conduct herself peaceably. She was to accompany him from Washington. The law was in pursuit of him; in his possession of her he held a valuable hostage. If she obeyed his directions, all would be well. Any outcry, resistance, or other betrayal of the fact that she was being compelled against her will, would insure her instant death—this he swore to with the most terrible and menacing of oaths, flourishing before her eyes the knife with which he would do the deed.

The detectives conferred together.

It did not seem probable that Mrs. Cornish would have been knowingly implicated in a plot against her own child.

"Find a avail for the young lady," Lyon suggested, "and do not let her name be spoken until she is out of the house. It will save a scene."

Simons understood. Mother and daughter passed each other in the lower hallway, neither dreaming of their kindred tie.

Cecilia was escorted to the hack by Simons. With one of the deputies accompanying them, they went straight to the Allsworth mansion.

"Mr. Allsworth," said the young detective, while father and daughter stood locked in the fond embrace of their great love, "the man, Jacques, is dead. Your daughter is returned to you, safe, as I promised. Now, here are the jewels, every one"—placing the sachet on a table. "To-morrow morning Mr. Lyon will be here—rather this morning, I should say, as it is now not far from daylight. He will bring to you the boy, who is undoubtedly your son. For the present, I wish you good-night."

The Allsworth jewels were restored.

Jack Simons pocketed a handsome reward and rested easy under his laurels. But he did not entirely put the case out of his mind until after a visit to the clairvoyant in the Northern Liberties. There still remained an item of mystery to him. How had the Frenchman brought Cecilia out of her death-like trance? It was soon explained.

Jacques and Madame D'Este were intimates, lovers. The charlatan was a strikingly handsome Frenchwoman.

He had discovered, when bending over Cecilia's coffin, that the young girl was not dead. There were certain signs produced by the subtle drug, which his quick eyes recognized; he knew that his fortune-telling lady-love possessed the potent mixture—she had more than once shown it to him, explaining its properties, effects, and the infallible signs by which one conversant with it could detect its presence.

Straightway as we have shown, he sought her. It was easy to connect the visit of the man to Madame D'Este on the night of Cecilia's encounter with the burglar, and the subsequent sham appearance of her death. To the cunning villain, it was plain that the law-hounds were playing some deep game. Jacques began to feel alarmed. Immediate flight was necessary. But he would take and hold Cecilia in some secure concealment, and if the law laid hold upon him he would make his freedom the price of her life. Practiced burglar that he was, it was not difficult for him to enter the tomb.

Some days after these events a barrel was found floating in the Potomac near the Long Bridge. Some boys who fished it out and hammered it open, found therein the drowned body of a chimpanzee. M. Derdier and Lyn had carried out their plan of ridging themselves effectually of the animal. Lepo.

Lyn and Mrs. Cornish were never suspected of being in collusion with the scoundrel, Jacques.

The trip to Florida was made. Ere they started for the tropic section of orange bloom, Lyn and Coralie were quietly married at Coralie's rooms. The death of Bob Daymon, Henry's twin brother, had left her free to wed. Madeline accompanied the bridal couple South.

Henry Damon was able to be out again in a few days. His first steps were to visit his betrothed. Cecilia told how she had seen him in the garden late on the night of the robbery; even at that distance from her window she could see in his hand, by the moonlight, the flash and glitter of jewels. The awful and unworthy suspicion came to her that her lover was the burglar.

There were tears, gentle reproaches, but—

When the ground was deep with snow, after New Year's Day, one starry, cold night, the Allsworth mansion blazed with lights, and sleigh-bells—wedding bells!—jingled merrily on the air. The "nine-days' wonder" of Washington society culminated in the wedding of Henry Daymon and Cecilia Allsworth, and on the occasion her lovely person was

adorned by the wealth of diamonds over which Jack Simons had earned considerable fame.

It was a gay, a crowded, a highly aristocratic reception; and the newspapers repeated, re-echoed, localized and editorialized the whole history, from beginning to ending, and over again in scraps, until not another paragraph could be strained out of it.

Finfin was retained by Cecilia as waiting-maid, and proved herself full of honest devotion for her mistress.

Tip was a long time in comprehending his sudden elevation. The bright lad soon won the love he had yearned vainly for in his buffeted childhood. In due time he was confided to the teachers who should eventually prepare him for college.

Of Mrs. Cornish—really Adelia Allsworth—nothing can be said, except that she remained forever dead to the world in her proper person, dead to the husband she had wronged, dead to the children upon whose love she had no claim—a wanderer, as it were, in a world made desolate for her by her own folly.

THE END.

Half-Dime Singer's Library

- 1 WHOA, EMMA! and 59 other Songs.
- 2 CAPTAIN CUFF and 57 other Songs.
- 3 THE GAINSBORO' HAT and 62 other Songs.
- 4 JOHNNY MORGAN and 60 other Songs.
- 5 I'LL STRIKE YOU WITH A FEATHER and 62 others.
- 6 GEORGE THE CHARMER and 56 other Songs.
- 7 THE BELLE OF ROCKAWAY and 52 other Songs.
- 8 YOUNG FELLAH, YOU'RE TOO FRESH and 60 others.
- 9 SHY YOUNG GIRL and 65 other Songs.
- 10 I'M THE GOVERNOR'S ONLY SON and 58 other Songs.
- 11 MY FAN and 65 other Songs.
- 12 COMIN' THRO' THE RYE and 55 other Songs.
- 13 THE ROLICKING IRISHMAN and 59 other Songs.
- 14 OLD DOG TRAY and 62 other Songs.
- 15 WHOA, CHARLIE and 59 other Songs.
- 16 IN THIS WHEAT BY AND BY and 62 other Songs.
- 17 NANCY LEE and 58 other Songs.
- 18 I'M THE BOY THAT'S BOUND TO BLAZE and 57 others.
- 19 THE TWO ORPHANS and 59 other Songs.
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